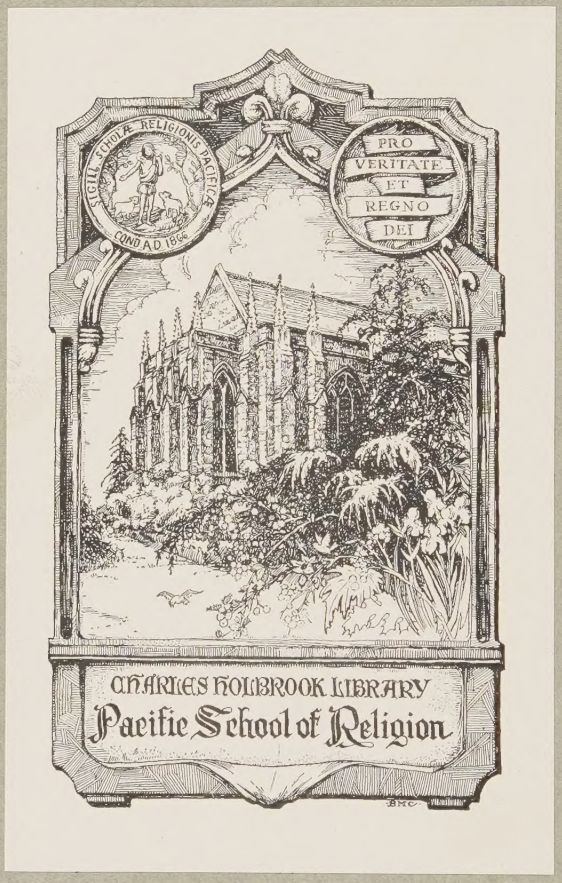
THE SOCIAL ETHIC OF NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH NONCONFORMITY

Cyril Handel Grant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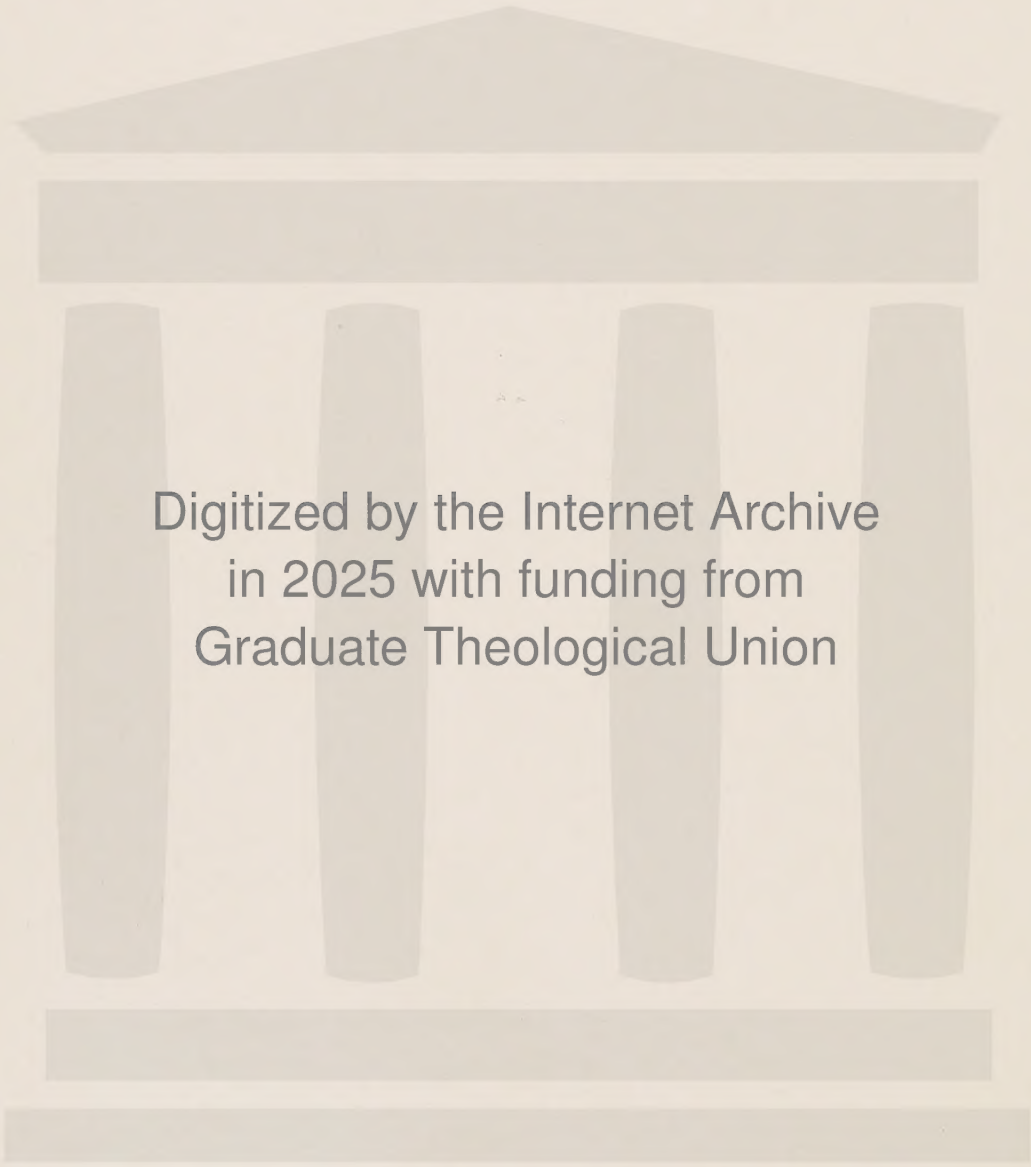
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THE SOCIAL ETHIC OF NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH NONCONFORMITY

by

Cyril Handel Grant

University of Manchester
Manchester, England
1946

Hartford Seminary Foundation
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INTRODUCTION

Before proceeding to state the purpose of this work, one of the most important preliminaries must be to discover how, and to what extent the control of bias is possible, and secondly, to make explicit as far as can be done, the bias of the writer. The necessity of this latter task will arise logically from the conclusions which are reached about the former, and will include a statement of the criteria in the light of which this investigation has been conducted and judgment made, upon the institutions, individuals, policies and trends here passed in review.

In days gone by when the scientific spirit was less cherished than it is now, the common practice of so-called educators and historians was to make all their teachings conform to preconceived and generally accepted philosophical and theological beliefs. One of the reasons for their doing so may have been that they knew too well what the penalty would be for the dissemination of heretical opinions. Indeed, the ideal of free speech has been realized only intermittently in world history. It was, however, true that up till the eighteenth century the work of most writers was defective and its conclusions invalid, because it did not dare say anything which cast doubt upon the accepted and tenaciously held ideas about the nature of man, God, and the universe. It is not uncommon then, in a pre-scientific age, in a country like the despot-ridden eighteenth century France to find historians such as Bossuet actually asserting (as he tries to show) that God orders the life of the world "for the glory of His Church and the Kings." St. Thomas More, however,

very neatly avoids the obligation to conceal heresies and the penalty for not doing so, by attributing them to a fictitious character whose defalcations he judiciously disclaims.

But all were not so clever, nor were most writers, even after Bacon, capable of understanding the superiority of the inductive over the deductive method of investigation into causes and effects. Perhaps the first to do so after Bacon was the "infidel" Voltaire who took up the cudgels against Bossuet and condemned the practice of writing history in terms of the prevailing theology.

Since the eighteenth century then, helped on by the _aufklarung_ and the rise of democratic ideals, the scientific spirit has come into its own. In the nineteenth century, the methodological shortcomings of men like Bossuet had become a lesson so well absorbed that long before Darwin, the principle of letting facts speak for themselves was receiving ever more widespread acknowledgment. Bacon, Descartes and Locke were rediscovered, and in the name of science the search for objectivity was on.

This was the great victory of an emerging scientific era over the age-old obligation to look at reality through the spectacles of superstition and fear. In so far as that happened, it was good; but the process went too far and often degenerated into a mere obsession for systematic efficiency in the collection of facts--a tendency which found its dismal prototype in the German historical research of the nineteenth century. To a large extent the same has been true of the social sciences. As Emery Neff declares in _The Poetry of History_, "accumulation of data

by the social sciences has been done at the expense of the poetic and imaginative insight into their meaning." This is true, and the result has been that everything incapable of being measured, weighed, or assessed by scientific means has been cast aside, with the consequence that the relevancy of the findings to the needs of men, has thus been largely obscured. Conclusions and judgments have been assiduously avoided in the determination to keep out the unscientific quality of emotional bias, and to achieve a cold and rigid impartiality.

Only very recently, however, has it been understood that bias cannot be absolutely eradicated and that complete objectivity is unattainable. The truth of this realization becomes indisputable when it is considered that the researcher must always be a human being and not a machine, that he can never be anything less or more than an intelligent person with emotions, thoughts, and attitudes ultimately inseparable from his heredity, family background, and education. These things make him what he is, and even in an effort to be "coldly scientific" will condition every move he makes.

In the work of the scientist and historian, therefore, no amount of skill can avoid the operation of bias and unwitting value-judgment. They are called into play from the very moment any research is contemplated and may indeed be its motivation. For example, in the choice and limitation of the field, in the objects chosen for investigation, in the selection and organization of the data: before any of these steps can be taken, tentative hypotheses must be formulated, and will necessarily

be made on the basis of a priori assumptions. Furthermore, unrecognized value judgments often creep in through the use of "axiomatic statements," ambiguous terminology, and certain catch phrases of high emotional content. How then is the problem to be solved? How is it possible to avoid the unfortunate results of concealed value judgments which, in spite of every precaution, will persist in permeating all research, thus hindering observation and invalidating the inference?

The most satisfying answer to this vexed question is given by Gunnar Myrdal in his study of the American Negro, An American Dilemma. It is to this important work, that I am indebted for some of the present observations.[1] Myrdal suggests that the only way to avoid implicit valuations is to make them explicit.

> There is no other device for excluding biasses in social sciences than to face the valuations and to introduce them as explicitly stated, specific, and sufficiently concretized value premises.[2]

In this way only, will it be possible to pursue a course of research unhampered by the sabotaging effect of continuously intruding biasses, and at the end to draw a rational inference from the data and the explicitly stated value premisses.

This is the procedure which will assure the greatest accuracy, the most valid conclusions and the least misunderstanding by the general public.

Moreover, particularly in the case of historical and social science investigations, and especially in the kind of

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[1]Myrdal, Gunnar, An American Dilemma, (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1944), p. 1027 & 1035.

[2]Ibid, p. 1043.

study which is here undertaken, it will be important to realize that although the facts adduced will be judged by the criteria explicitly stated, the direction of the research and the final inferences will possess only a hypothetical validity and that both of these might be changed by the substitution of different criteria.

In reference to the following pages for example, many of the controversies which convulsed the life of nineteenth century England are still alive issues today. The Church of England and the Nonconformist Churches still flourish as powerful forces in the land. It would be impossible for any thinking person not to experience agreement and often deep sympathy with some of the institutions, people, and policies of Victorian England. But for the purpose of historical research, it makes a vast difference whether the historian is a Tory or a Socialist, an Anglican or a Nonconformist, for the outcome of his work will be conditioned by such pre-established factors and they ought to be made explicit at the outset. The importance of such considerations for the study of an epoch near to, and continuous with, this present time, should be very clear, for it was a period in which emotions ran high in a struggle between ideals which drove the British people into two opposing camps and touched the very heart of reality.

One other point about the legitimacy of procedure needs to be made, and it is this; the criteria of judgment must be relevant and appropriate to the subject-matter of the research, or as Myrdal says:

> The value premisses should be selected by the criterion of relevance and significance to the cultural understudy.[3]

Disregard of this precaution may lead to much subtle error, especially in the assessment of historical events, e.g., it is a common mistake made by preachers, to interpret Jesus' parable of the Kingdom in terms of Spencerian evolution--a theory which however true, post-dated both Jesus and his hearers by 1800 years and is therefore unlikely to be what Jesus was seeking to illustrate.

If it is imperative for true understanding of the teaching of Jesus to see it through the eyes of the people to whom he spoke and not to read back into it later philosophical developments, it is equally important to avoid the same error in studying any and all of the events and pronouncements of history, whether they be of the first or the nineteenth century. The kind of criticism which we must always be on our guard to avoid is that which amounts to no more than blaming our ancestors for being men of their time and for not thinking with twentieth century minds. And in connection with this it may be pointed out that there are two types of criticism which should always be carefully distinguished.

In the first place, there is the criticism which attaches culpability to persons or groups for unwarrantably deviating from, or deserting, the basic criteria according to which those persons or groups professedly order their lives. Naturally the value of such criticism will depend upon how far the researcher

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[3]Ibid, p. 1045.

is able accurately to determine what the accepted criteria were, and to judge the power of the forces working against their continued implementation. It is a highly interesting question for example, as to why Jabez Bunting, who as leader of the Wesleyan Methodists took his part in agitating for the removal of Nonconformist disabilities on the ground that all have the right to organize their religious life according to the dictates of their own conscience, denied that very principle so grievously in his own denomination, that many were compelled to withdraw for conscience's sake. It is not too much to suggest that there was real culpability in so far as the autocracy of Jabez Bunting belied his over-all profession of faith.

Now, this kind of criticism is very different from that which calls in question the convictions which our ancestors held as men of their time. If they were true to their lights, on no ground can they be censured for not possessing the ethical insights which have come to us only by means of the progress of thought since their day. We may ascribe to them blindness and ignorance, and charge them with a lack of imagination and insight, but to say that they were false, dishonest, and self-seeking is a different and far graver accusation.

As we proceed with this study, the observations and declarations here made will be seen to have a very high significance, because one of the chief questions to which an answer will be sought is how far the feeble social conscience of nineteenth century English Nonconformity was due to the powerful movements operating against its vitality, and how far it can be

accounted for because the Nonconformists were untrue to their calling and false to their principles. It may be found that both of these reasons played a part. But if this question can be answered, then perhaps a clue will be uncovered to the reason for the appalling decline of Nonconformity in England during the last seventy years. And this in its turn may suggest a means for breathing new life into the somewhat uninspired witness of British Church life at this present time.

Working Pre-Suppositions

In accordance with what has been advocated in regard to the control of bias, it will now be necessary to give some indication of the basic convictions with which this study has been undertaken.

The Spiritual Dynamic of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. -- If learned divines have argued inconclusively for centuries about the nature of the person of Jesus, there has been less difference of opinion about the kind of individual Jesus was. It would be strange if most of the members of even such divergent schools of belief as those of Fundamentalism and Modernism could not join together in giving hearty assent to Jesus' proclamation of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man.

Such agreement would be possible because there is relatively little dispute among either Christians or non-Christians concerning the ethical perfection of Jesus' life, and the inescapability of his injunction to aspiring Christians to manifest in their own lives the same peerless spirit of agape. In other

words, it is a wholehearted love of God and man which is the sum and substance of the Christian life. That Jesus maintained this belief is obvious from even a cursory reading of the Gospels and is specifically declared in his reply to the question of the Sadducean scribe:

> Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart with all thy soul, with all thy strength and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment, and a second like unto it is this: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

The working out of these two great commandments was the consuming passion of Jesus' life, and he looked forward to the time when all mankind should be filled with the same holy zeal. In so far as men succeeded in living by the spirit of agape in all their activities, in so far would the Kingdom of God come. Now it may be possible here to cut the Gordian knot of controversy concerning the pre-millenarial or post-millenarial character of the Kingdom of God, by saying that the Kingdom of God is realized wherever the will of God is done. Endless proof-texting could be done both to "prove" and "disprove" that this was the thought of Jesus about the matter, and the results would be inconclusive. But it is this writer's conviction that the foregoing viewpoint is implicit in Jesus teaching. Indeed the Kingdom is here and it only remains for men to enter into its realization by high and holy living--which will always involve moral struggle. The realization of the Kingdom will involve the transformation of every department of life, and every activity of man in relation to society. (In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicates the attitudes, practices which should characterize those in whose lives the Kingdom has come.

This means that the moral struggle of man to realize those highest values of life which are associated with the realization of the Kingdom is not a matter of private religious experience only. Man is a social being, and as Jesus manifested supremely, the whole context of man's religious and moral life is to be found in human relationships. "The soul of religion," says Bunyan, "is the practick part," and at the very least, involves a practical concern for the moral, spiritual, and material welfare of one's fellow men. Jesus was wise enough to see that not only was the appallingly inequitable distribution of this world's goods unjust in itself, but that it was one of the most potent causes of moral and spiritual degradation.

It is not surprising therefore, to find that the poor and the oppressed find frequent consideration in the deeds and teachings of Jesus.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

Without entering into a detailed discussion of Jesus' pronouncements upon poverty and riches, it can be taken to be his belief that the gulf between the luxury of the rich and the wretchedness of the poor was a contravention of God's justice and that it behooved those who sought to serve God and man to seek the redress of such social evils.

If a Christian is one who believes in a personal God of love and justice, and therefore, in the sanctity of the human

personality, he will be bound, in making his contribution of practical service to the purpose of God for mankind, to strive with every nerve and sinew to help secure those conditions of life for his fellowmen in which the Kingdom may be most perfectly realized. The good gifts of the earth are more than sufficient for every one of its sons to enjoy an ample abundance, and in this age of complex civilization, until a way can be found to provide those conditions in which all men may enjoy God's beneficence, and realize life's noblest values within a framework of freedom and responsibility, the Kingdom of God is being thwarted and His will left undone.

The Church.--Jesus did not found the Church--it developed inevitably in response to the need for perpetuating and propagating the mind and purpose of Jesus. The Church exists wherever his spirit motivates the lives of men. It exists as an instrument through which the Kingdom may be realized, and to that end it seeks to nourish the inner life of those within its fellowship and to transform the life of society. While it does not pretend to be able to solve the technical problems of economic and social organizations, it is bound to make its voice heard when the organizations and policies of society contradict the high moral ideals for which it stands. The Church is guilty of betraying a sacred trust if it fails to give men an authoritative word concerning their social responsibilities. If it confines itself only to a regard for private religious experience, and personal "salvation," it aids and abetts the perpetuation of social evils which not only destroy for multitudes the possibi-

lity of Christian living, but in their turn contaminate the witness of the Church itself.

One of the terrible tragedies of the nineteenth century was that the failure of both the Church of England and Nonconformists to realize their obligations to an oppressed society alienated the multitudinous working classes and compelled them to espouse a leadership which was indifferent and sometimes hostile to religion. It may be doubted whether the Church in England has ever regained the lost initiative, and also suggested that the feebleness of its social conscience created the conditions in England for the rise to popular acclaim of avowedly anti-religious reform movements.

This much is true, the good life can never be fully lived in a sub-Christian society, nor on the other hand will a Christian society be possible without good men. That is why the so-called social gospel must be an inevitable part of the Church's proclamation of "good news" to the world.

Thus the Christian Church must move forward upon both flanks of the ethical front. It will work for the conversion of individual persons to the good life through the agency of the moral struggle, and at the same time, both through the individual members of its fellowship and as a corporate body, will endeavor constructively so to transform the order of society as to secure for all men equally conditions favourable to the achievement of abundant life at the highest spiritual level.

The Church will not identify itself with any particular political party or class of people, which was a mistake of some

branches of the church in nineteenth century England. Its aim will be to infuse spiritual values into the whole complex structure of organized life--political, economic, and social, and to this end will give support to all policies and institutions which in the name of God and humanity aim at the eradication of social evils.

Exactly what, in this writer's opinion, were the social evils rampant in England during the period under review will be made explicit in the course of this study.

Finally, there are several other relevant convictions which were established long before this work was contemplated and which should be simply recorded here. This is necessary in order to define more closely the context within which the subsequent findings and pronouncements shall have validity. Complementary to the viewpoints expressed in the foregoing, this writer believes in the creative love of God and the sacredness of human personality. Being convinced therefore that war in all circumstances is wrong, he is a pacifist. He rejects a neo-Calvinistic theology in favour of a liberal-modernism of the kind so ably expounded by the late Professor C. J. Cadoux. He believes that the Holy Spirit ever seeks to bring new revelations of truth to men and that these may be apprehended through any of our normal endowments as human beings. Furthermore, being a British Congregationalist, he adheres to the principle of the priesthood of all believers, and is assured that the Christian ministry is a function rather than an episcopate or hierarchy.

The way is now clear to begin the chief task of this inquiry, namely, to discover the contribution of Nonconformity to the abolition of social evils of the nineteenth century, and what it did for the creation of a more Christian social order. A second object will be to determine why it was that the contributions it did make were almost negligible, and finally to suggest how a thorough understanding of the mistakes of the past may be instrumental in revitalizing the spirit and witness of the Free Churches of England in this present day.

CHAPTER I

CONDITION OF ENGLAND, 1800-1850

The Rise of the Industrial Revolution

It would be no exaggeration to say that the direction of world history in the last two hundred years had been largely dictated, directly or indirectly, by the Industrial Revolution. Certainly, the effect of this unique phenomenon which radically transformed the whole structure of British life, was to provide Great Britain with an economic wealth which made her, for a time, the most powerful of the nations. The Industrial Revolution itself was compressed into a relatively short period. It was roughly between 1760 and 1800 that the foundations of modern industry were laid. During this time, the country passed from being an almost purely agricultural community of medieval peasants to a land of blast furnaces and workshops. These forty years witnessed the development of the factory system, the rise of the entrepreneur class, and the mushroom growth of the great towns in the north. By 1800 the Industrial Revolution had well defined the horizons of national ambition and the star of England rose with confident rapidity to illuminate the firmament of the nations.

Nobody can say why events happen when they do; it is only possible to cite the circumstances and agents by which they are brought about. The Industrial Revolution no less than many other convulsive movements of history may be described as the product of numerous independent forces which at the appropriate

stage of their development interacted to produce an entirely new phenomenon which changed the face of the earth.

It will be possible to do no more than single out one or two of the chief causes for this transformation.

In the first place, the beginnings of modern capitalism ante-dated the Industrial Revolution by several centuries. The old medieval agrarian economy had begun to decay as far back as the fifteenth century, notably in Italy. The growth of trade which was vastly stimulated by the colonial expansions of Portugal, Spain, and England, in America and the East, spelled the doom of feudalism, and life became motivated by new and exciting incentives.

As this development was taking place however, the Church, which hitherto had been the traditional arbiter of men's consciences, still clung to a theology which taught that usury was immoral, trading perilous to the soul, and the merchant a candidate for the red-hot gridirons of the nether-world.

R. H. Tawney in his Religion and the Rise of Capitalism[4] has shown how the great figures of the Reformation played their part in facilitating the growth of capitalism in Europe, and in replacing the ancient strictures of medieval theology with a new ethic. This is especially true of Calvin whose doctrine of absolute predestination and the necessity for ascetism were:

> admirably designed to liberate economic energies, and to weld into a disciplined, social force the rising bourgeoisie.[5]

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[4](New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1926) pp.63-132.

[5]Ibid, p. 111.

It so happened however, that in England the fierce liberty-loving spirit of the Puritans seized eagerly upon this aspect of Calvin's teaching and derived from it a claim for absolute freedom in the field of commercial activity, while at the same time his plea for the infusion of Christian ethical values into social institutions, was ignored. In view of this, it is not difficult to understand how all the old medieval economic vices were turned into new, modern, economic virtures. Greed became thrift; craftiness, foresight; and trade, the will of God. Capitalism came to be identified with the planned purpose of the Almighty, and the conviction that self-interest leads to social welfare received weighty confirmation in 1776 by emerging as the central thesis of Adam Smith himself.

It is one of the many strange turns of history, that in their economic ethic the Puritans were the unwitting progenitors of a development in which their descendants zealously espoused the idea of commercial self-interest while almost inevitably forgetting the theological sanctions from which it had been derived. The economic ethic of John Wesley had degenerated in almost the same way by the early years of the nineteenth century. Here was the growing gulf between religion and life.

Adam Smith pays no more than mere lip service to religion in the Wealth of Nations,[6] yet it must have been with complete sincerity that he advanced the notion that man inevitably cooperates with the purposes of God by following his instinctive ambition for pecuniary gain. The goal of economic life, he

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6 Book IV. Modern Library edition (New York: 1937) p.397.

taught, was to secure wealth for the individual, and it is a process which leads automatically to the welfare of society. If then, by the design of God this is the modus operandi of all economic activity, it would be nothing less than profane to interfere with it in any way. Thus says Max Lerner in his introduction to Wealth of Nations, he was "an unconscious mercenary in the service of a rising capitalist class in Europe. It is true that he gave a new dignity to greed and a new sanctification to the predatory impulses."[7]-- At the same time, however, it is only fair to say that this celebrated moral philosopher from Glasgow made the condition that where unrestricted liberty in business affairs did for some reason run counter to the public weal, it should be restrained.[8] Moreover, he opposed the growth of impersonal companies and trusts.[9]

Nevertheless, Adam Smith can be accurately regarded as the father of modern laissez-faire capitalist economy, while Malthus and Ricardo, do yeoman service as good god-parents.

Just how far this tendency thrived under the sanctions of religion is typified by the social ethic of the Wesleyan Revival. There is no doubt that the teachings of John Wesley concerning the economic virtues were somewhat mutilated by his followers, but W. J. Warner is surely right when he declares of Wesley:

> No moral casuist of the Puritan tradition laid a broader foundation for the fervent embrace of economic aims and values or are better suited to the expansive tendencies in the society of the Industrial

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[7]Ibid, p. ix.
[8]Ibid, Book I, p. 250.
[9]Ibid, Book I, p. 129, and Book IV, p. 537.

> Revolution. The corollary of the asserted beneficence of money was to approve it as a goal of effort.[10]

Thus it may be seen that conditions were ripe in the latter half of the eighteenth century for the growth of commercial and industrial activity.

But it is certain that the Industrial Revolution could never have happened unless this period had also been one of unprecedented scientific discovery. James Watt had patented his first steam engine in 1769, which gave an immense impetus to the growth of the factory system; to the mining of deep coal and the production of iron and steel. Moreover, the inventions of the rolling mill and the puddling process in the 1780's overcame the technical difficulties which stood in the way of large-scale manufacture. Thus, the eighteenth century which opened for England with a failing iron production, saw at its close all those methods beginning by which it was to be made capable of meeting the demands not only of industrial engineering, but of railways, steamships, and modern buildings. Production of iron is said to have risen from under 70,000 tons in 1790 to 400,000 in 1820.[11]

At the same time, a similar expansion took place in the textile industry which was revolutionized between 1730 and 1790 by a host of inventions for the speeding up of weaving and spinning. The first spinning jenny of Hargreaves in 1765, the water

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[10] W. J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1930)

[11] G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British People (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947) p. 119.

frames of Arkwright in 1768, Compton's mule of 1779, Bell's mechanical calico printer of 1783, and Cartwright's wool combing machine of 1795, using first water, then steam power made possible a development of such rapidity that the quantity of raw cotton consumed in Britain rose from 5,000,000 pounds in 1781 to 124,000,000 in 1810, and to 164, 000,000 in 1820.[12] Such facts mean little in themselves but exemplify the way in which manufactures of every kind were building up into the tremendous thrust of the Industrial Revolution.

This great movement in world history could never have begun, of course, without the favorable circumstances of a good banking system which made capital readily available, and, more important still, the colonial enterprise which had opened up nearly the whole of the known world both as a source of supply of raw materials and of demand for finished goods.

It would be surprising if these sweeping changes in industry did not send their repercussions through the whole gamut of contemporary life, and this result was indeed manifest in the social and political convulsions of the day.

The working classes.--One of the first social effects of the Industrial Revolution was to create a working class and remodel class distinctions. The rapid development of industry, co-extensive with expanding world markets, demanded more labour than ever before. This was supplied by wholesale migration from the country to the town, on the one hand because factory labour was wanted, and on the other because the position of the small

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[12] Ibid, p. 119.

farmer was being rendered untenable both by the competition of large farmers and the importation of foreign foodstuffs. Thus there appeared within a short time, new and teeming townships. Pleasant little villages like Birmingham, grew into huge cities, as factories increased in size and number. The South declined in importance while the North became the world's largest and most concentrated industrial area.

Unfortunately, the towns were ill-prepared to meet the hugely increased demands caused by the immigration of workers from the country and the phenomenal rise in the population.[13] Old houses became overcrowded, and new ones were built as fast and as cheaply and as near to the factories as possible without the slightest regard for sanitation and public health. In this year of 1948, people are still living in these same houses, but one hundred years ago conditions were infinitely worse. Many of the labourers from the country brought into their new urban life, habits acquired in a desperately low standard of living (as in Ireland.)

> The imagination can hardly apprehend the horror in which thousands of families one hundred years ago were born, dragged out their ghastly lives and died...the drinking water brown with faecal particles...courts where not a weed would grow, and sleeping dens afloat with sewage...the industrial territories were growing up as best they might, undrained, unpoliced, ungoverned and unschooled.[14]

The factory system also generated its own peculiar evils. The new working classes could not fail to be impressed with the

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[13] In 1801, pop. was 9,000,000; in 1811 over 10,000,000; and in 1921, 12,000,000. Ibid, p. 117.

[14] G. M. Young, Portrait of An Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1936) p. 23.

idea that life was one long occupational hazard. Cramped conditions, insufficient ventilation, an atmosphere often dangerously laden with dust and fluff, the extreme dampness inside the cotton mill work rooms, the dangers of unguarded machinery, the strain of unremitting attention to a machine driven by the never tiring power of steam. These were hardly calculated to contribute to the enjoyment of life.

Moreover, compared with the great goal of production, human flesh was cheap, and many of the owners and overseers of the factories paid little heed when the inhuman conditions of factory life suddenly cut short the wretched lives of their employees.

It is not known with certainty when child labour came to be used on a large scale in the factories, but that it was before 1802 is certain[15] for in that year the first Factory Act relating to Child Labour was passed. At that time, the conditions under which children were employed were brought to light with sufficient publicity for the country to be fully informed. Ill-treatment of children in factories was widespread. Work rooms and sleeping rooms were overcrowded; relays of child workers kept filthy beds in uninterrupted use day and night; sometimes they dropped asleep at their work and fell into the unfenced machinery, often with fatal results. It was not uncommon for these miserable children to be sold like cattle in hundreds and fifties to the highest bidder, under the guise of

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[15]John Wesley in 1787 commends a conscientiously managed silk mill which kept "two hundred and fifty children in perpetual employment." John Wesley, Journal, Vol. VII, p. 300.

apprenticeship in accord with the Law of Elizabeth. Driven on by brutal treatment, they were compelled to work for unbelievably long hours without even the comfort of proper food and accomodation. After a few years, with bodies that were often too mutilated, deformed, or diseased to carry on the struggle, the young victims left their work unpossessed of any education, technical, intellectual, or moral, which would enable them to earn a living.

There is abundant testimony in the early years of the nineteenth century to prove that such conditions, though not universal, were widespread enough to constitute a growing social evil. In order to make explicit and incontrovertible the evidence and the publicity which it was from time to time accorded, it will be enough to refer to the attestations of witnesses before the Committee on the Factory Bill, recorded verbatim in Hampden in the Nineteenth Century or Colloquies on the Errors and Improvement of Society.[16]

A witness, one William Cooper is examined. In answer to questions he proceeds to explain that at the age of ten he was employed in a Leeds flax mill. He worked seven days a week from five in the morning to nine at night. During the whole day the only intermission was forty minutes for dinner at noon, which time often had to be spent in cleaning the machinery. This boy's sister was compelled to work in the card room from five in the morning until eleven at night--with forty minutes' break for dinner. Frequently the whip was used when these children were inattentive to their work. While still a boy,

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[16] (London: Edward Moxon, 1834) Vol. II, p. 206.

this same William Cooper broke down with illness brought on by the excessive labour. Afterwards he was able to get about only with a stick. "When he somewhat recovered, he applied for work, but the overseer said he was not fit for it; and he was then obliged to throw himself on the parish." (When the above facts were read to him from the report of the Committee on the Factory Bill, Charles Bertrand, friend of the radical Lord Hampden bursts out "Gracious Heaven, and this is a Christian country!")

Another witness, William Hebden, makes the following affirmations concerning his experience of the conditions of children in the mills:

> They are generally cruelly treated; so cruelly treated that they dare not hardly for their lives to be late at their work in a morning ... it is a very difficult thing to go into a mill in the latter part of the day, particularly in the winter, and not to hear some of the children crying for being beaten for this very fault ... some have been beaten so violently that they have lost their lives in consequence of being so beaten, and even a young girl has had the end of a billy roller jammed through her cheek ... There was a woman in Holmfirth who was beaten very much ... and she also lost her life in consequence of being beaten with a billy roller.[17-18]

So the evidence proceeds, providing an insight into the slave-like conditions in which, for a mere subsistence, the masses who built the commercial prosperity of Great Britain dragged out their sordid existence.

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[17] Ibid, p. 216.

[18] From Hampden also comes the testimony of one who writes under the pseudonym of Don Manual Alvarez Espriella. He writes (of Manchester) "To talk of English happiness is like talking of Spartan freedom, the Helots are overlooked." "In no other country can such riches be acquired by commerce, but it is the one who grows rich by the labour of the hundred. The hundred human beings like himself, as wonderfully fashioned by nature gifts with like capacities and equally made for immortality are sacrificed body and soul." Ibid, p. 230.

The rising prosperity of the country however, consequent upon the growth of manufactures, was either vitiated by the necessities of the war with France, or consumed by those who did not belong to the working classes. Workmen's wages varied greatly in the early years of the nineteenth century, but they were never high enough in any trade to allow anything but extreme frugality. Indeed, with the more widespread introduction of machinery, the demand for labour fell off and the competition for work was so great that only those who pushed their wage claims down to appallingly low levels were taken into employ. In 1815 for example, we are told that the hand loom weavers in the cotton industry were already at starvation point, their wages having fallen from 23/- in 1805 to 8/- in 1818.[19]

This was as nothing, however, compared with the conditions which characterized that terrible period of depression known as "The Hungry Forties" lasting roughly from 1837-1844. This was due in no small degree to the refusal of the Reform Parliament of 1832 to repeal the Corn Laws. In spite of the ascendancy of the Whigs at Westminister neither Jeremy Bentham nor Robert Owen could exorcise the spirit of Adam Smith and the other orthodox economists. So the price of wheat rose, nearly doubling itself between 1836-1840, while for those who remained in employment, wages experienced a series of sharp declines, and as the wretchedness of the working classes increased, starvation became rampant. Colonel T. P. Thompson describes the conditions which existed in Bolton in 1841 thus:

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[19]Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 121.

> I think I know what is the minimum of help by which horse, ass, dog, hog, or monkey can sustain existence, and where it must go out, for want of appliance and means of living. But anything like the squalid misery, the slow, moulding, putrifying death by which the weak and the feeble of the working classes are perishing here, it never befel my eyes to behold, nor my imagination to conceive.[20]

That conditions of this kind, which would constitute a festering sore in the life of any nation, were allowed to continue unchecked in an avowedly Christian, cultured, and enlightened country is, to put it mildly, incongruous. The picture of the plight of these working classes of the early nineteenth century is completed by the observation (challenged by most contemporary observers) that disease, crime and moral degradation were the almost inevitable concomitants. Speaking of the year 1841, Rosenblatt declares:

> Consumption and febrile diseases of a malignant and fatale character, together with plagues, prevailed in almost every house, and raised the mortality rate of the population to a point threatening almost racial extermination.[21]...The cellars especially became hotbeds of diseases.[22]

It is not surprising that the increase of crime was rapid and widespread. Commitments rose from 21,000 in 1836 to 31,000 in 1842.[23] The large majority of convictions were for thefts of food. "There is no law," said George Stevens in a letter to Lord John Russell, "for a starving man--there is no tie of conscience or principle binding upon a famished wretch who hears a wife and children clamorous for food."[23] The contemporary

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[20]Archibald Prentice, History of the Anti-Corn Law League, quoted by F. F. Rosenblatt, Social and Economic Aspects of the Chartist movement, Studies in History, Economic and Public Law (New York: Columbia University, 1916) p. 65.

[21]Ibid, p. 65.

[22]Ibid, p. 66.

[23]Ibid, p. 67.

Bishop of London, however, took a very different view in being questioned about the causes for the increase in crime. Said he,

> To impute conduct and the influence of circumstances is to destroy the distinction between virtue and vice and make mankind believe that they are not accountable beings.[24]

The difference in attitude between these two men (one a churchman, the other a spokesman for the people) is typically representative of the attitude which certainly in the first fifty years of the century, characterized secular radicalism on the one hand and church polity on the other--and from this declaration the Nonconformists are by no means exempt.

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[24]Hampden, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 53.

CHAPTER II

THE SHAPING OF THE NONCONFORMIST CONSCIENCE

The question immediately to be considered is why Nonconformity as an avowedly Christian movement was apparently so apathetic to the social distress which obtruded itself upon the nation. Why was it that the Free Churches of England, everyone of whose members would have claimed Jesus as the founder of their Faith and professed him as the supreme exemplar of noble living who spoke and taught with the authority of God Himself, why was it that the social implications of Jesus' teachings were almost completely ignored? In an age where it would have been heresy to question the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, it is strange to find whole generations of pious and fanatical Free Churchmen, who (in terms of contemporary conditions) were apparently unable to find any relevant meaning for themselves in those parables of their Lord and Exemplar which illustrate the sacredness of life over property, and the blessedness of the publican over the Pharisee. In this proof-text loving era, it would be interesting to know how those who professed their strivings to follow in the way of Jesus, would have explained the general disregard of their master's explicit pronouncement that his mission was to the poor and the captives, the blind and the oppressed.[25] Indeed, an even more serious question than this must be asked. On what ground of Christian charity could Nonconformist Churches not only ignore the social

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[25]Luke 4:18-19.

outreach of their acknowledged faith, but deny it so flagrantly as to throw their weight of support on the side of movements and policies whose aim was to withhold deliverance from the captive, and sight from the blind and freedom from the oppressed? In other words, why did the nineteenth century Nonconformist churches of England do practically nothing to aid the abolition of social distress and to encourage the construction of a Christian social order?

Evidence for the contribution which Nonconformity did make is given in Chapter IV. It will be convenient, however, first of all to give the reason why it is so slender in order to widen the context within which the social activities of Nonconformity must be appraised.

The answer to such questions cannot be immediately perceived. Nor, indeed is there only one answer. The truth is that no events, institutions, movements or policies can, in the nature of things, exist in isolation. Moreover, the more complex civilization becomes, the more interdependent and inseparably intertwined are the forces at work within it. To understand relationship which exists between the forces which make civilization what it is, is to understand the process of history. The cogency of this truth is seen at once when a beginning is made to uncover reasons for the social attitude of nineteenth century Nonconformity. The life of the Free Churches of that time was highly complexioned by a variegated kaleidoscope of movements and circumstances--so highly complexioned that those kaleidoscopic thought-patterns and opinions of the time fastened them-

selves ineluctably upon nearly every branch of organized religion in the country. If therefore it is desired to interpret the activities and inactivities of the Nonconformist church in the field of social ethics, as an integral part of practical Christianity, the imperative task will be to discover to what extent its thought was shaped by the great formative influences of the time.

The Burden of Political Disabilities.--The first of these to be considered will be one which lay at the heart of Nonconformist witness and which indeed had dictated the pattern of English Church history for over two hundred years--the burden of political disabilities. It is not necessary to recount step by step the story of the struggle for religious freedom and equality with the Church of England, maintained incessantly by the Dissenters, and which nearly ended in their obliteration by the Schism Act of 1714.

The salient features in the course of events may be indicated as follows: In spite of the Toleration Act of 1689, which prohibited the enactment against Dissenters of the penal laws of Elizabeth and Charles II, (that is providing certain conditions were fulfilled,) there were still great obstacles in the way of achieving full religious liberty. The most that can be said, even after the dramatic failure of the Schism Act to become law, is that Dissenters were given a grudging legal protection. And when the new century entered upon its first year, their legal position was not very happy or promising. The Test and Corporation Acts still remained as a stigma and provocation.

They prohibited Nonconformists from taking any part in the rule and administration of either their parish, borough, county, or State. Nor were Dissenters allowed to hold any corporate office in the Bank of England or in the great overseas trading companies. They were not only excluded from taking commissions in the Army and Navy, but were barred from the doors of higher education. The Grammar Schools and Universities were merely branches of the Church of England, and therefore legally closed to all except those of the Anglican persuasion. Nor was it possible for a Dissenter to be married or buried except by a clergyman of the Established Church. There were also other kinds of disabilities connected with the legality of trusts and endowments.

In addition to all this however, the old Five Mile and Conventicle Acts still remained on the Statute Books, and as late as 1810 we are told that

> 90 was recovered from persons found at a prayer meeting, and at another meeting a man was fined 20 for offering public petitions to the Almighty.[26]

Small wonder then, that the energies, brains, and time, of Nonconformists were consumed in the never-ending struggle to secure the repeal of disabling Acts.[27] The possibility of ultimate triumph filled their whole horizon of endeavor. To be a Nonconformist was to be an agitator against disabilities.

But the world-shaking event which visited its dire repercussions upon the unhappy heads of Dissenters and made their

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[26] J. A. Houlder, A Short History of the Free Churches (London: R. D. Dickson, 1899), p. 144.

[27] Unitarians and Romanists were in an even worse plight for they were expressly excluded from the benefits of the Toleration Acts.

position much worse, was the French Revolution. The triumph of the Jacobins against the Bourbons had spread panic and alarm among the ruling classes of Britain. The Jacobinist label was as the Communist tag today. To raise a voice against the Government on any score was to run the risk of being branded as a traitor. Thus it is not surpising to find that the Nonconformists whose memories and instincts did not predispose them to think well of any government, encountered a resurgence of suspicion and hostility. In fact, High Church ecclesiastics in a spirit of bitterness made strenuous efforts to procure the repression of Dissent. These aims came to something of a minor climax in 1810. In this year Viscount Sidmouth introduced to the House of Lords a bill to check the facility with which persons entered the Dissenting ministry. In a measure to prevent cobblers, tailors, pig-drovers, and chimney sweepers from assuming "the sacred office" he proposed that no one should be allowed to obtain a certificate as a minister unless he were recommended by six respectable householders of his own denomination.[28] All sections of Dissent (together with the Methodists, who now for the first time joined in religious political effort for the common good) rose to promote speedy and determined opposition, fearing that if successful, this legislation would only pave the way for further restraints. Multitudinous petitions were therefore presented, which, on the day of the second reading of the Bill, literally covered the floor of the House of Lords.

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[28]W. G. Addison, Religious Equality in Modern England, 1714-1914. (London: S.P.C.K., 1944), p. 38.

And this move succeeded in crushing the intended legislation. This victory may be said to mark the beginning of a new period in militant Dissent, for within three days, there came into being the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty which soon acquired the support of powerful political allies, notably in the persons of Lord Holland and Lord John Russell.[29] The Society received the enthusiastic backing of all Nonconformist bodies and their members. From this time on, the agressive campaign of Dissent against its disabilities was waged with gradually increasing success, and with the war whoops of John Wilke, and William Smith, swung over to the initative. In 1812, the repeal of the Five Mile and Conventicle Acts was secured and Unitarians were accorded legal equality with the other Dissenters.

Then, after prodigious efforts and planning to win influential support, the great battle against the Corporation and Test Acts was successfully concluded and they were repealed in 1828. Thus, never again could "Churchmanship and Citizenship be presented as interchangeable terms."[30]

But there was no relaxation of vigilance, and agitation for further concessions. Free churchmen eagerly supported the Reform Bill of 1832, principally because it would mean an extension and consolidation of their own liberties.

The final goal of all Nonconformist effort was absolute equality with Anglicans, and as a corollary, disestablishment of the Church of England. Even the fight for the Repeal of the

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[29] Ibid, p. 39.
[30] Ibid, p. 53.

Test and Corporation Acts, was regarded as just one preliminary skirmish in the crusade for this great end. And for the specific accomplishment of this, an Anti-State Church Association was formed in 1844.

Although the agitation for the abolition of church rates failed completely when the Lords, both in 1837 and 1853, rejected a Bill proposing the measure, important concessions were secured by Nonconformity in that former year. The official birth-registration of Dissenters' children was legalized, and enactment was passed enabling Dissenters to be married either at the office of the registrar or in their own place of worship.[31]

Very gradually, progress was also made by Dissenters in securing the right to higher education. In 1854, scholarships and the degree of B.A. at Oxford were opened to them and in 1856 the B.A. and M.A. Degrees at Cambridge.[32] It was not, however, until 1871 that the religious test of assent to the doctrines of the Anglican Church was abolished as a condition of admittance. This enabled Nonconformist colleges to become integral parts of the two oldest universities. Yet as late as 1899 Divinity degrees were still withheld from Nonconformist students.

One of the most hated requirements still in existence was that which was laid upon all holders of public office to declare their belief in the authenticity and truth of scripture and promise not to use their office or its influence against the Church of England. After four consecutive years of rejection

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[31] Ibid, p. 62.
[32] Ibid, p. 69.

by the Lords this disability was removed in 1866.

For half a century or more, Dissent had won every round in the fight for equality and freedom. A very large measure of tolerance and liberty had been attained. On this ground, alone, it might have been supposed that much of the time, energy, and money which had been needed to secure the redress of their own peculiar injustices, might at this stage of the struggle have been dedicated by the Nonconformists to the task of aiding the emancipation of those who were condemned by a sub-Christian social order to the injustice of living in poverty and enduring its attendant miseries.

True, conditions had somewhat improved since the Hungry Forties. True, England had secured prosperity and peace, but it was a prosperity whose fruits were enjoyed almost exclusively by the ruling and middle classes, and a peace beneath which lay the rumbling unrest of those to whom "abundant life" was known only as a preacher's platitude.

The failure of Nonconformity to grapple with such a situation and the urgency of the need may perhaps be measured by the fact that there arose in response, an entirely new kind of religious organization whose chief concern has always been, not primarily with organization and doctrine, but the succor of human lives--the Salvation Army. This unique movement brought an unusual emphasis into the activities of organized religion during the last quarter of the century, and certainly one which was out of keeping with the dominant theme of Free Church endeavour. For by this time, the Nonconformist hounds were in full chase,

with disestablishment as the quarry. Advantage was taken of the new Liberal Government of 1868, under the powerful auspices of the Liberation Society, to mount an offensive in Parliament in favour of disestablishment the coming of which was regarded by ardent Free Churchmen like Edward Miall, as being only a matter of time. The militancy of political Dissent was never greater than in this period. Says William George Addison:

> Gone were the days of a tentative and timorous application for a redress of grievances and of a provisional promise of their partial removal by an olympian and unsympathetic minister; time was transposing submissive suitors into bold and resolute warriors; apologetic defence was giving place to confident and sustained attack.[33]

The sustained attack was kept up for twenty years and hardly a day passed but what there was some sniping and sparring in the two Houses. And yet after the first tactical success in 1869, which brought the disestablishment of the Irish Church, little was accomplished, and with the defeat of the Liberal Government by the Conservatives in 1886, the cause was lost.

It is difficult for those who know the present relationship between the Established and the Nonconformist churches in Britain to understand the deep sense of inferiority and stigma which the Dissenter of the nineteenth century was made to feel by reason of his disabilities. It is equally difficult to imagine how the bitter animosity of those times crept into every detail of daily life, and how the fires of fanatical resentment moulded the limited aims of organized Dissent. But such was the situaion. On no account must the great triumphs of Noncon-

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[33] Ibid, p. 145.

formity in its crusade for religious liberty be minimized, but it is the purpose of this study to investigate the record of the Free Church movement in the field of the "social gospel." An effort to adhere to the main point of inquiry therefore will not be mistaken for lack of appreciation.

Sometimes arguments are put forward to excuse the almost exclusive engagement of Nonconformity with the struggle to extend its own political and religious liberties, and while there is some element of justification for these, the Free Churches cannot be exonerated from blame in neglecting other important areas of activity which should have engaged their earnest attention as propogators of the Christian Gospel. The theory that the heart of Nonconformity was full of compassion for those who were victims of social evils, and that one of the chief motives of Dissenters in seeking the removal of disabilities was to be able to achieve a position of political power and influence which would enable them to improve social conditions, is untenable. There is no direct evidence for it, and indeed, history shows that in an issue where the social conscience of Dissent was somewhat disturbed, for example, the Slave Trade, the burden of disabilities proved no insuperable barrier against effective action. Moreover if such were in reality a Nonconformist aim, the relative freedom and liberty which was theirs during the last few decades of the century would have enabled them to make good their high intent. And indeed a fight for the disinherited and the oppressed could have added great strength to the fight for the rights of Dissenters. But this was not a live option

for a movement which had allied itself with the interests of a single class, and its political opportunities receded when the government which represented the interests of that class fell from power.

Yet, though this had happened, the chance still remained for the Free Churches to throw their prestige of equality and numerical superiority into a crusade for the betterment of social conditions, but they did not do so, for there were other complicated factors in their existence that would have made such a step disadvantageous.

The narrow and limited objectives which characterized the later Victorian Nonconformity, are well illustrated by the Rev. J. A. Houlder, a Congregational minister who produced A Short History of the Free Churches in 1899. At the end of the book under the title of "Present Duty and Future Prospects", he says:

> Free Churchmen must continue to strive for the removal of the last vestiges of religious disability, and the possession of equal rights with those who are at present associated with the State: and they must do so the more readily and earnestly not merely for their own sakes, but for the sake of the Episcopalians themselves; who, freed from the shackles that bind them and the corrupting and enervating influence of their connection with the secular government may then be expected to renew their strength, to deepen their spirituality, to extend their influence and to take unfeigned delight in joining with their humbler brethren in every work of charity and pity the Master bids them.[34]

There is more than a hint of Pharisaic self-righteousness here, which is not untypical of the then prevailing attitude

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[34]Houlder, op. cit., p. 210.

In this connection it is pertinent to inquire how far the long preoccupation of Dissent with its own grievances had the effect of turning its gaze in upon itself[35] blinding its eyes to some of the larger and more basic needs of mankind. How far the attainment of relative equality engendered a feeling of smugness and self-satisfaction it is impossible to tell, because there are so many other factors which might have played a part in that process.[35] However, a positive indication that the struggle for religious freedom had no small hand in preventing the Nonconformist movement from fulfilling its wider mission to society, is to be gleaned from the fact that while the Nonconformist Parliament of 1868 was convulsed with debates on disestablishment and burial laws, the sister churches in America, untrammeled by legal disabilities were all-aglow with the fire of the "social gospel."[36] Men in the churches whose consciences were aroused led the campaign against conditions which, though similiar to those overseas, were less acute. Yet there was no denomination in Britain that could match the work of men like Josiah Strong, Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch. The great figures of English Nonconformity were concerned with very different matters and William Booth alone possessed the distinction of avowedly seeking to regenerate not only the individual but also his environment.[37]

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[35]See p.40 for the contribution of the class character of Nonconformity to this result.

[36] . . Hopkins, Social Gospel in America, 1865-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press,).

[37]H. Rider Haggard, Regeneration (London: Longman's Green & co., 1910), p. 13.

Laissez-faire and the middle classes.--If the struggle for religious liberty was inimical to the social conscience of nineteenth century Nonconformity, the fact that the membership of Free Churches was confined almost exclusively to a single social class produced an eminently more damaging effect.

That Victorian Dissent did become identified with the middle classes and middle-class politics, is not an opinion but a fact. Rev. Thomas Binney, made this specific claim in a speech to the Congregational Union:

> Our special mission is neither to the very rich nor to the very poor. We have a work to do upon the thinking, active, influential classes which fill neither courts nor cottages, but which, gathered into cities, and consisting of several gradations there, are the modern movers and moulders of the world.[38]

Mr. Binney was right when he described the middle classes as the "modern movers and moulders of the world," for they were the independent, prosperous traders and manufacturers in whose direct employ the vast majority of the working classes laboured.

But how did it happen that Nonconformity came to be the spiritual home, neither of cottage occupant, nor court dweller, but of those who lived comfortably in their respectable family villas?

To understand the combination of circumstances which produced such a phenomenon it is necessary to emphasize what was said in Chapter I. It would be beyond the purpose of this paper to detail the process whereby the entire range of economic activity was withdrawn from under the sovreignty of the Christian

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[38]H. F. Lovell Cocks, The Nonconformist Conscience. (London: Independent Press, 1943), p. 79.

gospel. But the following salient features which are germane to the inquiry here undertaken may be noted.

As previously indicated, the Rennaissance and Reformation hastened the declining authority of the economic pronouncements of medieval scholasticism, and particularly through the doctrines of Calvin, gave an added impetus to the new economic virtues of the swiftly developing capitalism. The old feudalistic theory that society was an organism whose welfare was the responsibility of everyone of its members under the aegis of the church, disappeared, and subsequent developments combined to foster the growth of a sturdy individualism. It was left to later writers to draw out the implications of John Locke's newly formulated political theories, and these together with the economic ethic of Dissent, and the equalitarian ideas of Rousseau produced a new ideal of individual freedom unconfined by the restrictions of Church or State. The character of Puritanism contributed not a little to this result. For the Puritan, the revelation of God to the individual soul was the centre of all religion. Thus, interference with this private relationship by any third party was quite unwarrantable. Such was the inference; and from here it was but a short step to the conviction that if business and trading are a part of life, any interference with it by government or other agency is tantamount to challenging the will of God. As R. H. Tawney declares of the Puritan:

> He drew from his idealization of personal responsibility a theory of individual rights, which secularized and generalized, was to be among the most potent explosives the world has known.[39]

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[39]R. H. Tawney, Religion and The Rise of Capitalism (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1926), p. 230.

Both industry and frugality were cornerstones of the Puritan's religion, and if this combination of qualities brought him a measure of prosperity, then, as a good Calvinist, it was only natural that he should regard himself as one of the elect. Calvin indeed had not condemned riches, but only the bad habits often associated with them.

In connection with this the following assertion of Mr. Tawney has direct bearing upon the matter:

> Convinced that character is all, and circumstances nothing, he sees in the poverty of those who fall by the way, not a misfortune to be pities and relieved, but a moral failing to be condemned, and in riches, not an object of suspicion--though like other gifts they may be abused--but the blessings which rewards the triumph of energy and will.

and then:

> Tempered by self-examination, self-discipline, self-control, he is the practical ascetic whose victories are won, not in the cloister, but on the battlefield, in the counting house, and in the market.[40]

Such men as these were the fathers and grandfathers of those nineteenth century middle-class Nonconformists whose warehouses and factories were the backbone of a prosperity which made Britain the most powerful nation on earth. The solemn conviction of Queen Victoria that England owed all its greatness to the Bible contained a subtle modicum of truth the exact meaning of which she herself could not have perceived. But it was there; and every one of the pious, chapel-going, middle-class Dissenters for whose progenitors the calls of business and the duties of religion had come together in congenial recon-

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[40] Ibid, p. 230.

ciliation, would have claimed the Bible as the source-book of principles by which his disciplined life was lived. The complex strands of his inheritance would have been beyond his power to unravel, even if he had wished to do so. And not all of them had been woven by men so pious and Bible-loving as he. Yet if he ever felt any doubts in his conscience about the gulf which yawned between his own comfortable position in the world and the animal-like squalid existence of those who were merely workers in his factories or labourers in the field, there came to his mind abundant reassurance and consolation. After all, had not John Wesley himself encouraged industriousness and frugality, and preached a Gospel which exhorted his followers to do well for themselves upon the rialtos of commerce.

> We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can; that is in effect, to grow rich.[41]

But the Christians who clasped such advice fondly to their hearts, either genuinely forgot, or found it convenient to forget, the rather less pleasant things which the Methodist leader had to say about riches. Exhortations to "Give all they can,"[42] and warnings to the effect that riches diverts men "to love of the world, desire of pleasure, of ease, of getting money,"[43] were not observed with the same enthusiasm.

It is not surpising that the Wesleyan revival, while its influence re-invigorated the life of the older Dissent, con-

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[41] Arminian Magazine, Vol. X, 1787, pp. 155-156, quoted in W. J. Warner, Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution (New York: Longman's Green & Co., 1930).

[42] Ibid, p. 159.

[43] Ibid, p. 153.

tributed not a little to the process of transmuting the Christian ethic into a middle-class ideology in which the economic virtues remained as habits after their religious impluse had disappeared. In the nineteenth century, religious duties and the calls of business, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had come to be identified in practice, gradually drited apart, until, without its being explicitly apparent to the middle-class chapel goer, there was at last little observable connection between the two. This did not mean however, that the prosperous Nonconformist businessmen turned away from the church. On the contrary their piety, discipline, uprightness of character, to which they solely attributed their material prosperity, led them every Sunday to seek spiritual replenishment at the fount of the chapel-worship.[44] Thus did the prosperous, middle-class, Nonconformity become an institution of British life and the unspectacular power behind Britain's prestige. James Bennett aptly sums the matter up when he says:

> Dissenters occupy precisely that middle station in society which is most affected by the stagnation of trade and the increase of taxation...the immense increase in the wealth of the country by means of manufactures and commerce created a new order of men who rose from mediocrity or poverty to far greater incomes than those which were possessed by titled Nonconformists of the first era of Dissent.[45]

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[44]The onset of the Industrial Revolution had speeded the development of the middle-class ideology and given unlimited opportunity for the practice of the economic virtues. It is no coincidence that the new industrial towns of the North grew up to be strongholds of Dissent (which they still are to this day) --those very industrial towns upon which the blight of poverty and disease lay heaviest.

[45]James Bennett, History of Dissenters, 1808-1838 (London: , 1839), p.

Before 1828, the pleas for repeal for the Test and Corporation Acts were generally made "on the grounds that the Dissenters were the most industrious group of people in the Kingdom and that they paid a large part of the taxes which supported the government."[46]

The cities were a living testimony to the transformation in the structure of social life which the Industrial Revolution, combined with the developing middle class ideology, had wrought. In the cities both middle classes and working classes lived, or rather one lived, the other existed. Misery and comfort were to be found together, cheek by jowl. Usually however, it happened that the lean, bony, jowls were to be discovered inside the city under the lee of the factories and workshops owned or managed by members of the middle class, while the well-filled cheeks would take up residence away from the factories, on the outskirts of the town.

Now, the pertinent question to be asked here is this; how far was the middle class character of nineteenth century Nonconformity responsible for perpetuating the distress of the working classes?

In the first place there can be little doubt that the middle-class manufacturers and business men who were the main supporters of the chapels up and down the country, were responsible for the building and management of the factories and workshops which gave employ to the proletariat. As mentioned

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[46]R. G. Cowherd. Protestant Dissenters in English Politics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), p. 77.

above, these two classes lived in segregated juxtaposition.

But the whole background and upbringing of the Nonconformist conspired to convince him either that poverty was attributable not to inauspiciousness of circumstances but to defect of character, or else that it was inevitable. Either way, there was little incentive to do anything about it. And the reasoning which vindicated the general apathy was perfectly logical. If prosperity was the result of industriousness, discipline, and moral rectitude, then poverty was the inexorable consequence of idleness, laxity and immoral living. And in support of his conclusions the factory owner could point to the drunkenness, crime, disease, and above all, to the non-chapel-going habits of the working classes. If a man is poor, then it is his own fault; if he does not rise to the eminence of being a wealthy factory-owner or business man, it is because he does not exercise the superior moral qualities and the Christian virtues of those who do. If he did, he would. Therefore if the poor man falls by the wayside, if he lacks clothing, food and a bed, and is in ill-health, it is his own fault. Yes, he is to be pitied, but the only help he is to get is that of instruction in the moral principles of the Christian religion and an exhortation to mend his ways.

One gets the impression that even that work of mercy was carried out only with half-hearted distaste, for we are told this about it:

> The Dissenters were, however, making an effort to reach the poorer classes. They had organized themselves for the instruction of the working

> classes. There were six such societies in Manchester, one Unitarian, and five Independent.... Although the Dissenters were making some effort to reach and to instruct the lower classes, such effort was too feeble to be very effective.[47]

This is a very interesting and somewhat sinister commentary upon the kind of social ethic which the Nonconformists displayed and the zeal with which they pursued it. In spite of what has been said, it is strange that during the periods of comfortable relaxation and leisure, which most of the middle-class chapel-goers must have had, it never seemed to occur to them that a man's poverty and degradation might result partially, or even entirely, from the conditions of employment imposed upon him. Did it never appear plausible that a man might steal because the pittance he was able to earn did not enable him to buy enough food for his family, or that a man might contract disease because of the cheap insanitary, back-to-back housing provided for him to live in and the incredibly unhealthy factories built for him to work in? Did it never seem to be a possibility that the reason why few members of the working class rose to positions of eminence, was not because they did not possess the native qualifications for doing so, but because years of childhood toil in the factories at twelve hours a day, seven days a week, had prohibited their education, mutilated their bodies and injured their minds? Perhpas it is not to be wondered at that inasmuch as these members of the working classes were denied the refined pleasures enjoyed by their masters, they were led to

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[47]Kay: Moral and Physical Conditions of the Working Classes, p. 20-21, quoted in Ibid, p. 78.

seek momentary escape from the intolerable drudgery of life, at the public house. And, furthermore, with all these things in mind, shall one heap blame upon the families of the poor because they were not much attracted to the Nonconformist religion of their employers?

If such possibilities as these ever entered the minds of well-to-do middle-class people, they never seemed to have given expression to them. What hope was there in such a situation as this, that Nonconformity as a movement would ever develop a social conscience or regard it as being even remotely connected with Christian duty to agitate for the construction of a Christian economic order?

Now, it must be admitted that there were many in the middle classes who did not blame the wretchedness of the poor upon deficiency of character. They took the view that irrespective of moral quality, widespread poverty was unavoidable. The doctrines of the orthodox economists, especially Thomas Malthus, had worked their way into the very fibre of Nonconformist middle-class thought. Mr. Malthus, educated in a Dissenting Academy (though himself a Church of England parson), had written his "Essay on Population" in 1798, as a criticism of the prevailing Poor Law which worked as a stimulus to the increase of population by reason of the fact that it enabled grants to be given out to those whose wages were below subsistence level. But it seemed to Malthus that it was a natural tendency for population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, and that any attempted legislation aimed at an improved standard of

living would be of no avail, since the sex instinct is ineradicable, and it would result in only still larger families. Thus there was raised in the mind of Malthus and in the minds of those who heard about his theories, an impassable barrier to every scheme and dream of social regeneration.

If there existed any tendency on the part of respectable Dissenting families to experience vague and mild twitchings of conscience in contemplating the distress of the poor, this was a doctrine full of the balmy and reassuring comfort that after all poverty was not the result of the inhumanity of man to man, but a manifesto of the glorious and inscrutable wisdom of God. It was only logical, therefore, that if on this ground, nothing could be done about poverty, nobody should try to do anything. Yet, there was perhaps one thing that would be of benefit. Mr. Malthus himself had admitted that the practice of self-restraint (principally in postponing marriage) might be so developed as to keep the number of human beings within the limits of a comfortable existence. Here then was another "proof" that the only possible way to improve the habits and condition of the poor was by instruction in the doctrines of the Christian religion.

A third ingredient of the middle-class ideology, which had some share in confining within a marrow mould the social ethic of nineteenth century Dissent, must be briefly noted. One of the most serious liabilities of a "class church" is the danger that its witness to the claims of the Christian Gospel will be modified by the vested interests of its members. The preacher will be sure that the kind of spiritual message he delivers

will not conflict with the deep-seated principles and practices of those in his congregation upon whom the budget relies for maintenance of church activities.[48] The Gospel will be processed and edited to make sure that it shall please and not offend.

Emil Brunner has correctly diagnosed this deficiency in the Nonconformist churches of the present day, which incidentally, are very much less representative of a single class than they were a century ago. He says:

> The Free Churches are forced to play for popularity; in their criticism of social conditions, they dare not go to the last ditch; their mouth is stopped by consideration for the members who support them. This need not be so, but as a rule is so.[49]

Such an accusation is a tragic indictment but no one can deny that that was the captivity into which the nineteenth century Free Churches had half-unwittingly delivered themselves. Their chains bore a remarkable similarity to those with which the Church of England was shackled as it ministered to the interests of the Tory landowners. And to this day, they have not been sholly shaken off.

In such a situation therefore, it is no surprise to find the preaching of this period concerning itself largely with such subjects as "the perils of infidelity," "the sins of intemperance," "the horrors of hell," "the glories of heaven," "the bles-

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[48]Vide. The concentrated study of a small community under the domination of the vested interests of those in "class Churches" is made by Professor Liston Pope in Millhands and Preachers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941).

[49]Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (New York: The MacMillan Co.,) tr. by Olive Wyon, p. 550.

sedness of adversity," and "the indisputable wisdom of God." Any radical suggestions to the effect that the economic order could be improved upon, that in its workings it could be made to bear truer testimony to the spirit and teachings of their Master, Jesus, who came that men might have life and have it more abundantly--such radical suggestions would have been taken as an affront to the business interest of the hearers, and would have borne the impress of infidelity with which, in their minds, it was most closely associated.

In these three ways then, the middle-class character of nineteenth century Nonconformity succeeded in strangling the "social gospel" before it could be born. The Dissenters, by and large, except in the matter of those political injustices and religious inequalities which affected their own lives, were anxious to maintain the status quo. The question as to whether they were eager to maintain it because they genuinely believed it to be the best and most Christian order that could be devised, or because they selfishly wished to protect their own special interests will be discussed later on. Perhaps it was a rationalized combination of the two.

However, it can with confidence be stated about this middle-class ideology, that its tang of self-righteousness, paternalism, and hypocrisy alienated the working classes and drove them in their struggle for human rights to espouse a radical leadership which was often not only violently antagonistic to the churches, but avowedly anti-religious. Such a tragedy had no small part to play in preparing the ground for a world-

shaking sequel -- the advent of Karl Marx, in whom both radicalism and atheism reached their climactic proportions. Who can say but that if the so-called Christian Churches of Britain had shown a little more the spirit of the good Samaritan and less of the Levite, and had taken the lead in pleading the cause of social equality as well as ecclesiastical, Karl Marx in England would have experienced less provocation to sit for thirty years in the British Museum writing Das Kapital. It is an interesting fact, that a man who was professedly anti-Christian, in seeking to relieve the poverty of the oppressed should have usurped the principle of the religion he despised while the devotees of that religion themselves, in the name of their Faith, were opposing those who tried to do so.

The Nonconformists had cried infidelity when there was no real infidelity, but when infidelity did indeed raise its head to bid for the souls of the proletariat, the Nonconformists could do nothing about it, for they had become good bourgeois businessmen, and had thrown in their fortunes with political Liberalism. It may be oversimplifying a complex matter, but it is certainly no fantastic or irrelevant exercise to speculate how far the genesis of this present world crisis of 1948 is to be found in the failure of nineteenth century Nonconformity to accept its Christian responsibility and become a protagonist for the social gospel.

The convulsion of unbelief.--The nineteenth century was pre-eminently an age of inquiry--also of revolutionary discover-

ies and decisions. Gradually, between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, men began to see truth no longer as absolute, philosophically static, revealed once and for all; but as relative, genetic, and evolutionary. As part of this process, the established theology of centuries, the most tenaciously held religious convictions concerning the validity of the Bible, the nature of man and the reality of heaven and hell, were all subjected to rational scientific inquiry and eventually called in question. Increasingly as the century progressed, the Church of England and the Nonconformist Churches found themselves working together in their struggle to roll back the tides of "unbelief."

In no way does it detract from the importance of the controversies which in those days convulsed the whole of organized religion to say that they constituted an additional barrier to the development of a constructive social ethic. Churches of every denomination waged a bitter battle against the "heresies" of science and the increasing secularization of thought. To them it seemed to be a life-or-death grapple to preserve the very existence of the Christian Faith against the onslaughts of "unbelief" which came upon it from every quarter.

Untold sermons were preached against a geology which contended that the earth existed aeons before man existed and disproved the literal Genesis story of the Creation and the Flood; against a Darwin who implicity cast doubt on the fact that life had been created, and destroyed the teleological proof of God's existence; against a physics which suggested

through the First Law of thermo-dynamics that if energy was indestructible there was no need of an energizer and through the Second Law that the solar system so far from being an ever-improving cosmos directed upward and onward by a wise God, would, in fact, run down until the earth became a frozen life-less globe when the sun had dissipated its heat.

The brains and energies of practically the whole English Church were pitted in what many supposed to be a death-struggle against such rank "heresies" as these. The parsons took their stand almost to a man upon the verbal inspiration and absolute literalness of the Bible. But the Holy Book itself was subjected to the merciless scrutiny of rational, historical, investigation. German theologians such as Baur, Strauss, Fichte... came up with evidence that the Bible was riddled with contradictions and uncertainties--it was indeed a fallible record of human events, not a God dictated Book.

Nor was this all; historians like Hegel and Marx began to claim that a scientific logic could be deduced from history. Before Spencer came upon the scene, Auguste Comte produced an evolutionary interpretation of history and argued that all thought passed through the three stages of theological, metaphysical and scientific. Comte believed that truth was evolving away from Christianity and that in conformity with the trend, men should rid themselves of outworn creeds and transform their worship of God to humanity. In fact much of Christian dogma was declared to be immoral, and Francis Newman inveighed against the wickedness of the atonement, predestination, and redemption by grace.

One cannot deny that some of the more thoughtful among those in both the Anglican and Nonconformist churches, for e.g. Bishop Colenso, Hugh Price Hughes, and James Martineau, did take the enlightened viewpoint that beliefs must always be formulated on the best evidence available, and that merely to believe something because there seems to be an emotional or intuitive inclination to believe it, is an attitude which runs a great risk of turning into bigotry and prejudice. But those who, among the turmoils of controversy, were clear headed and courageous enough to think in this way, were few.

It is also true that before the end of the century, a reaction had set in which showed that agnosticism was not the last word. The rationalist cosmos began to be undermined, and Science no longer admitted a purely mechanical interpretation of the universe. Some of the scientific laws which T. H. Huxley took to be axions were seen to be no more than metaphysical speculations, and even Marx and Freud threw doubt on premises of the purely rationalistic.

Later developments such as these, however, did little to conciliate orthodox Christianity, and for at least a decade after 1900, the conflict between science and religion continued to absorb the attention of the Church.

Now, the exact extent to which the convulsions of "unbelief" in the second half of the century prevented Nonconformity from clarifying its social ethic and preoccupying itself with the regeneration of a sub-Christian social and economic order is impossible to determine. As previously indicated, there were

other conditioning factors involved. Nonconformity was not only in the vice-grip of a middle-class ideology which severely limited its witness, but throughout nearly the whole century was pursuing a vigorous campaign for religious equality with a goal no less ambitious than disestablishment.

This much can be said however; Nonconformity cannot be exonerated from failing to exercise a virile Christian social ethic on the ground that it was defending itself from the attacks of unbelief and agnosticism--even if its apologetics were free from obscurantism and prejudice, which they were not. For even during that turbulent period there were sections of organized religious life which, while stoutly defending a very conservative theology, were constrained by love for their fellowmen to take some action, however small, in the field of the "social gospel."

The Salvation Army for example, whose doctrines to this day are far more traditionalist than those of most Free Church denominations, from 1877, plunged into the work of social regeneration in response to an obvious unmet need. And more importantly, that very Church of England which the Nonconformists despised for its subservience to the state and parasitic dependence upon endowments, and which joined forces with Dissent in hurling tirades against the unbelief of Huxley, Morley, and Bradlaugh, gave birth to a startling new interest in social and economic affairs. Stuart Headlam had founded the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877, and in 1889, the Christian Social Union came into being under the two great names of Charles Gore and Henry Scott Hol-

land.[50] These were only the first two of several Church of England offsprings which were dedicated to a revision of the economic order.[51]

Yet, even though the Nonconformist Churches (because they were middle-class in character) might not have made any greater show at embracing the "social gospel" if they had not been constrained to rush to the defence of their Faith, there is evidence for the fact that at least two of the smaller denominations while not feeling the same constraint to indulge in apologetics, put into practice a constructive social ethic. They were the Unitarians and the Society of Friends, which astonishingly enough derived their membership largely from the middle class.

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[50]It is interesting to note that both the leaders of Christian Socialism, 1848-1854, namely F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, were clergymen of the Anglican Church who defended an extremely orthodox theology.

[51]The Church of England in the twentieth century has provided the best leadership in the sphere of social ethics culminating in the work of Archbishop Temple (1886-1943.) Other landmarks that may be mentioned in this field, include the Church Socialist League, 1908, League of the Kingdom of God, 1924, C.O. P.E.C., 1924, Industrial Christian Fellowship, and the Society of Socialist Christians, 1926, and Free Church Fellowship, 1928.

CHAPTER III

NONCONFORMITY AND POLITICAL RADICALISM

It would be quite natural to suppose that the acuteness and maturity of the social conscience of nineteenth century Nonconformity, could be roughly deduced from the extent to which it gave support and approbation to radical movements which aimed at abolishing sub-Christian injustices in the economic order. But this cannot be done with any degree of accuracy, for quite apart from the inhibitions induced by the struggle against disabilities and the middle-class character of Dissent, the two qualities of violence and unbelief which had at least in the early years come to be thought of in Nonconformists minds, as the inevitable concomitants of radicalism, alienated much of the sympathy which otherwise might have been forthcoming. These three --radicalism, unbelief, and violence, constituted a trinity which was held to be just about as inviolable a union as the other Trinity in which most good Nonconformists believed, and as diabolical as their own dogma was sacrosanst.

Nevertheless although no Nonconformist denomination officially associated itself with any radical working class movements in the first fifty years of the century, there were, here and there discerning and fearless men of Dissenting churches who gave unstinting support to radical aims.[52] Yet, when all is said and done, this did no more than throw up in stark relief the record of apathy and hostility towards the revolt of the working classes, which characterized both Nonconformity and the Church

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[52]See pp. 68, 76, 78.

of England.

An attempt will be made to elucidate in more detail the attitude of nineteenth century Dissent toward working-class movements, particularly Chartism as the first organized proletarian reform movement of modern times, and in the process to note the positive contribution of Dissent to proletarian aims.

The eighteenth century had ended amid the flood tide of revolution. From the time of the storming of the Bastille in 1789, the old France of the middle ages had been torn down by a savage and triumphant proletariat in a welter of passion, violence and blood. The clarion cry of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood rang through Europe, and at first the revolution was cordially welcomed in England. But there were many who carried away with enthusiasm at the beginning, were later horrified by the practical interpretations of Rousseau's doctrine as carried out by the Jacobins. The Revolution came to assume the shape of a horror and a menace. It turned propogandist and aggressive and sought to install itself by force of arms in countries where, though its principles might be admired, its methods were abhorred. Its tactics precipated a war with Great Britain which continued with scarce a day of peace, until 1815.

Moreover, in the eyes of organized religion in England, the anti-Church character of the Jacobins, branded them as atheists. The irreligion of Frenchmen became as hateful as French military agression, and it seemed to the good Englishman that as a loyal patriot, he must also be a convinced Christian. Indeed except for the Tom Paines, Macintoshes, and Charles Foxes,

when the orgies of the Terror loomed large in the public eye, it was not easy for contemporaries to see in the Revolution the assertion of principles which might become a blessing to generations yet unborn.

One of the undoubted reasons why the alleged infidelity of the French revolutionaries--quite apart from their atrocities, --produced a revulsion of feeling on the part of the English Church is that, while revolutionary thought stressed the natural rights and perfectability of man, Nonconformity and Anglican theology alike convicted him of sin, and insisted that he was a fallen creature.

This fundamental cleavage which goes far to explain the aloofness of Nonconformity to radical movements in England, also explains why Unitarianism was an exception to the rule. Unitarians were unique among religious bodies in England in that they did not believe themselves to have an infallible revelation of God in Scripture. They did not hold the orthodox doctrine of the divinity of Christ, nor any theory of Atonement, save perhaps, the Abelardian. They believed that to be a Christian was to be like Christ, and that truth, discoverable by reason, mattered supremely. Moreover, they did not regard man as a fallen creature. In the liberality of their thinking the Unitarians stand apart from the rest of organized religion, much as the Quakers do. Their theological position was more conducive to the production of a social ethic and had more in common with Deism and eighteenth century rationalism than the orthodox theology of the other Nonconformist denominations.[53]

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[53]Thomas Paine and the Unitarians were at one in attac-

All this is the more surprising in view of the fact that until 1813, Unitarians had no legal right to exist. It is not infeasible that this most grievous of disabilities gave them an added sympathy with revolutionary movements.

At any rate, it is reported that "All Unitarians of whom there is any record, were in warm sympathy with the French Revolution."[54] Prominent Unitarians were active figures in the London Revolutionary Society, especially the Reverends Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and Theophilus Lindsay. Richard Price delivered a sermon before the society in November 1789, in which he

> Thanked God that he lived to see thirty millions of people spurning slavery and leading their kind in triumph....and the dominion of Kings and Priests giving way to the rule of law, reason, and con science.[55]

The immediate effect in England of the French Revolution was to give a tremendous impetus to radical movements. The London Corresponding Society was founded in 1792, and the Society for Constitutional Information, and the Friends of the People acquired a new lease of life. Strong centers of reform grew up in Norwich, Sheffield, and Manchester.

In most of these movements, Unitarians took an active part unlike other Dissenting bodies and suffered severely in the reactionary policies of the government, which the growth of re-

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king the obscurantism of the Church, and in The Age of Reason, Nonconformity and unbelief find their common denominator.

[54]Raymond V. Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1938), p. 106.

[55]Ibid, p. 107.

form agitation evoked.

In 1794 and 1795, the Pitt Administration suspended the Habeas Corpus Act and civil liberty was drastically reduced. By the time the new century opened, the government's "reign of terror" had reached its height.[56]

Unitarians were tried for sedition and sentenced to transportation and imprisonment. A Baptist minister, the Rev. William Winterbotham, preached a sermon in which he declared that every man in the land of liberty had the right to know how his money was being applied. Notwithstanding his protestations, "that in this country we want no revolution...because it would produce anarchy and bloodshed," the Rev. Mr. Winterbotham was arrested for preaching the sermon and sentenced to four years imprisonment.[57]

There is very little evidence to show that the rest of Nonconformity looked with favour upon the Unitarian implication in reform movements. The Unitarians were theological outcasts, and because of their association with so-called revolutionaries, were identified in many Nonconformists minds with unbelief and treason. At Bolton on one occasion, Tom Paine and the Unitarian minister were burned in effigy together.

By and large, Nonconformists entrenched themselves in the camp of the reactionaries--a move dictated both by prudence

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[56]Some aspects of it were ludicrous. Coleridge and Wordsworth, for example, on a walking tour in Somerset were suspected of being spies "because they looked out intensely toward the sea."

[57]Holt, op. cit., p. 116.

and natural inclination. Not only was their orthodox theology revolted by the apparent anti-religious character of radical forces, but their prosperous middle-class supporters, stood to lose too much by the victory of working-class aims.

For at least twenty years after the French Revolution, the government regarded with suspicion all who questioned its authority on any score whatever. Renewed hostility broke out against Dissent in some sections of the Church and Government on the ground that it was a cloak for sedition. In such circumstances as these then, the main body of Dissent as a group struggling not for the redress of economic grievances but for religious equality with the Church of England, adopted the policy of remaining aloof from any political movement whose aims could be interpreted as being subversive.[58]

The Congregationalists and the Baptists, led by their famous orator, Robert Hall, after momentarily favouring the triumph of democracy in France, took a solid stand against it and at outbreak of war, rallied with resolute patriotism behind Pitt and the Government. Of all the denominations, the Methodists were the most rabid in allying themselves with the forces of reaction. The Toryism of John Wesley is well-known, and the Revolution crystallized the hostile attitude of Methodism toward all left-wing movements. "Thereafter all sympathy between the political reformers and official Wesleyanism was severed."[59]

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[58]There must have been also the realization that a record of loyalty to the government would stand in their favour when it again became discreet to resume the campaign against disabilities, and this actually was the case. vide. Cowherd, op. cit., p. 77.

[59]Warner, op. cit., p. 124.

> All levelling schemes are as impious as they are absurd, because God has decreed that diversity of ranks shall subsist to the end of the world.[60]

Such sentiments as these are typical of early nineteenth century Wesleyanism.[61] Throughout the great labour disturbances which broke out intermittently during the first fifty years of the century, the Methodists repeatedly averred their unwavering support of King, Constitution, and Government. Opposition to working-class societies was universal. In 1817, the London members of the "Committee for Guarding the Privileges of the People called Methodists" sent an address to all Methodist Societies. In this address, the desire is expressed

> to prevent every member of the Methodist Society from being misled by the delusive acts of designing men, and to guard them in the most solemn manner against attending tumultuous assemblies, joining themselves by oath or otherwise to illegal political associations, and in any projects contrary to the duties of true Christians and loyal subjects....Fear the Lord and meddle not with them that are given to change. Avoid them. Come not near them.[62]

Practically the whole of Methodism, from Jabez Bunting downward, and the more moderate reactionary opinion of other Dissenting bodies, were vigorously hostile to the political activities of the working people. Those who belonged to working class societies were called "evil disposed persons," "factious and disloyal," "unreasonable and wicked men," "disciples of

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[60] Ibid, p. 124.

[61] A leading Methodist, Thomas Coke, declared in 1801, "I was happy to find that the three men had been expelled from the late Mr. Wesley's society about five years ago for their democratic sentiments. Warner, op. cit., p. 131.

[62] Robert F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850. (London: Epworth Press, 1937), p. 177.

infidelity," and so on.

Moreover from the accusations which are hurled, it appears that the Dissenters were unable to perceive that sedition, unbelief, and violence, are not the inevitable corollaries of reform. Yet, the result of making this unwarrantable and dangerous mistake of thinking they were, was that reaction and oppression became a Christian duty, while opposition to reform and defence of political injustice were transformed into patriotic virtues. And here we see that extraordinary but not unusual phenomenon of the Christian ethic being denied in the name of the Christian ethic.

One would have thought that theoretically, Dissenters might have felt some spark of sympathy with working-class agitations, in view of the fact that both groups were struggling against injustices which the government had power to rectify. But that did not happen, for reasons which have already been mentioned. It is interesting to speculate however, whether it ever occurred to those right-wing Nonconformists who so bitterly denounced the efforts of mistreated fellow men to achieve recognition of their human needs, that these working people desired no more than the opportunities which all middle-class Nonconformists themselves enjoyed--to earn a living wage, to dwell in a decent house, and to bring up their families without being tormented by the fear or actuality of starvation and disease. Exactly to what extent such thoughts entered middle-class minds, and how far the action which must have suggested itself was rejected out of purely selfish motives, is something which can never be known, for the simple reason that selfish motives are

always disguised beneath the cloak of rationalization. An attempt to distinguish bogus rationalization from honest reason in the social ethic of Dissent, will be made in a following chapter.

Whatever conclusions are reached on this score, the fact remains that Nonconformity set its face resolutely against "subversive" proletarian aspirations. No specific indication is given by Congregational and Baptist historians as to the attitude of their denominations toward Luddism (1811-1816) and other working-class agitations, of the pre-Chartist era. But it may be inferred from what is otherwise known that their position was one of strong disapproval.

It is known that the Methodists in accord with their Tory leadership and reactionary policies, were intensely hostile and because of their uncompromising stand actually lost 5,000 lift-wing members in the year 1819.

In view of the existing situation and character of Nonconformity it is no surprise to find that it would have nothing to do with the humane and mild proposals for reform of men like Robert Owen, especially when it is known that he attacked all religious bodies as enemies of progress. No amount of good works could save him fron the howling condemnation of all branches of the Christian Church--not even his renowned success in turning New Lanark into a model Christian community.

As a matter of fact, Robert Owen was not anti-pathetic to religion per se; his bitterness arose because the churches were indifferent in face of the appalling social evils. Consi-

dering the denunciation which was heaped upon Mr. Owen and all his works, by orthodox religion, it will throw some light upon the social outlook of the churches if the salient features of his proposals and beliefs are noted.

After winning prestige as the model employer of the New Lanark Mills one of his first campaigns of national importance, was to advocate an Act which would prohibit all child labour under ten years of age, to limit the hours of labour to ten and half for all under eighteen and to provide paid inspectors who would enforce these conditions. Employers were heatedly antagonistic to the proposal, and the Bill which was finally passed four years later in 1819, contained only a fraction of Owen's demands. It applied only to cotton mills; it put the minimum age of employment at nine instead of ten; it limited hours to twelve and only up to sixteen years of age; and the provision for inspectors was entirely eliminated. If the power of Nonconformist influence had been solidly behind these humane propositions of Mr. Owen, there is no doubt that even if his Bill had not been accepted in its original form, it would certainly not have received so great a mutilation.

One of the most widely known schemes which Owen initiated was the establishment of "Villages of Cooperation" as a means of relieving pauperism and unemployment. These villages obviated the necessity of poor relief by providing useful work as a means of subsistence.

In 1813-14, the would-be reformer published his magnum opus, New View of Society, which showed clearly the kind of

philosophy from which his schemes sprang. He believed that the whole basis upon which the industrial system worked was wrong, and that the principle of cooperation should be substituted for unrestricted and cut-throat competition. The scramble of greedy employers to increase their business and fortunes by underselling competitors resulted in only misery for the masses of the people. Moreover, he had proved conclusively in his own New Lanark mills, that the provision of decent working conditions resulted in more production and better business, to say nothing of the amazing moral improvement of the workers.

This led Owen to the conviction that environment plays the primary part in forming character; thus he felt an obligation to decry prevailing moral ideas, namely that circumstances have nothing to do with character, that wickedness must be ruthlessly punished, and virtue inculcated. If society wished its workers to be virtuous, then it should provide an environment in which their good qualities would have some chance to grow. Such a philosophy brought Mr. Owen into conflict with the Church, one of whose chief doctrines was that man was a fallen creature, and innately wicked.

The Church, he believed, should teach human cooperation and fellowship rather than personal salvation and aggrandisement. On this ground he advocated the abolition of the entire capitalist and competitive system, which naturally brought every profit-seeker in the country against him--Nonconformists no less than others.[63]

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[63]Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 178-186.

It is very easy to believe, and almost certainly in accordance with fact, that Mr. Owen's motives were entirely impersonal and stemmed from a love for his fellowmen. On the other hand, it is almost impossible to believe that the motives which prompted the churches to oppose him and his schemes were either impersonal or without self-interest in view of the fact that if Owen's schemes had achieved any success, employers of labor might have had to accept some reduction in their standard of living.

It is idle to speculate on what might have happened if the advocated reforms of Robert Owen had found support in a Church whose life was not corrupted by vested interest, and whose interpretations of the Christian ethic were not twisted by bigotry and prejudice. Perhaps it is not too bold to suggest that the powers of darkness found their stronghold in a place where the churches of the day least expected them to be, and that that which the churches attacked as the abode of evil had become the temporary custodian of that spirit of which the churches themselves should have been a living testimony.

If the church had been alive to its full responsibilities, it is likely either that the name of Robert Owen would not have found a place in the annals of posterity in the way it has, or else that he might have become a leading layman in the social action work of the Church. In any case, the kind of social conscience which was exhibited by organized religion is at least indicated by the fact that not a shred of evidence can be found to show that Nonconformity spoke of the reformer's ideals in favorable terms.

Chartism

The Reform Act of 1832, was the first of a series of measures which gradually threw the government of the country into middle-class hands. Yet, even though the coalition of Court and Peers against the People had received its first trembling blow, and even though the Ten-Pound Householder had now secured the franchise, there was dissatisfaction at what the Act immediately accomplished. True, the Factory Act, the new Poor Law and the Municipal Corporation Act had become law between 1832 and 1835, but the constitution of the new Government was not Radical or even Liberal, but Whig, and by 1841 the Tories were again in power. The squirearchy, the wealth and power of the great landowners, and the exclusiveness of the House of Commons were still unchallenged.

Yet if the middle classes were disappointed at the result, the proletariat were much more so, for in spite of their agitations, they were left out of the Act altogether. Every demand which they made had been ignored, and such a happening served only to reinforce their conviction that the middle-classes who were indifferent to the unredressed grievances of the workers, stood not for equality, but respectability.

This disappointment of working class political and economic aims spurred on the proletarian leaders to even greater exertions and led to the rise of Chartism. One of the greatest single incentives for the redoubled efforts which were made, was the injustice of the new Poor Law of 1834 which contained the following provisions.

1. No relief to the able-bodied except through a workhouse.
2. Such relief to be "less eligible" than the most unpleasant means of earning a living outside.
3. Separation of man and wife to prevent child-bearing.[64]

> Thus at one end of the scale, little children destined for the sweated labour market, were being inured to misery on the cheapest possible terms, at the other Joan was being torn from Darby, lest any spark of love should mitigate the wretchedness of their declining years.[65]

The new poor law rested heavily on the shoulders of industrial workers, for it was introduced at a time of severe trade depression. The abolition of outdoor relief denied the unemployed any opportunity to find employment. Yet if they refused to enter the workhouse, relief could not be obtained.

The resistance of the working classes to this unjust measure may be said to be the genesis of Chartism. Government commissioners, especially in northern districts, sought to enforce the application of the Act, and were met with resistance, sometimes not only from the workers, but from employers. For example, John Fielden, M.P., a Unitarian employer of labour in Todmorden, prevented the Act from being applied in that area, as long as he lived.

In this pre-organizational stage of Chartism, as well as later, the Rev. J. R. Stephens, a renegade Methodist minister,

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[64] Ibid, p. 234. Feargus O'Connor, the famous Chartist orator, describes how he would treat Lord and Lady Brougham, (well-known Nonconformist spokesman in the House of Lords) on their arrival at the work house door: "I shall be sorry for Lady Brougham. I know no harm of her. But I would have no pity for him: 'No, no, Harry,' I will say to him, 'you may not go with my Lady; this is the way for you; otherwise you might breed.'"

[65] Esme Wingfield Stratford, The Victorian Tragedy. (London: George Routledge, 1930), p. 98.

was one of the leading agitators. As a passionate advocate of resistance, his espousal of violence sounds about as unWesleyan as any words could:

> If the musket and the pistol, the sword and the pike, are of no avail, let the woman take the scissors, the child, the pin or the needle. If all fails, the firebrand--ay, the firebrand, the firebrand, I repeat.[66]

It was mainly in the north, however, that the advocates of violence were found. In the other parts of the country, more reliance was put upon the "moral force" of meetings, resolutions, petitions, and education.

In 1837, the London Working Men's Association expressed the moderate aims of Chartism in a six-point Charter which was presented as a petition to the House of Commons. Its main provisions, though political in character, were motived by extreme economic distress. They were as follows:

1. Universal male suffrage
2. Equal electoral districts
3. Annual Parliaments
4. Payment of Members
5. Secret ballot
6. Abolition of property qualifications

It would not be in keeping with the main purpose of this study to trace the history of Chartism. It will be done only in so far as it throws light upon the attitude of Nonconformity towards this movement.[67]

Reference has already been made to the indifference and hostility of the proletariat toward the bourgeois character of

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[66]Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 236.

[67]The material for this section is drawn largely from Chartism and the Churches, by Harold Underwood Faulkner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916).

organized religion. Large numbers of working people became disciples of free-thought and, as with radical movements of former years, it was inevitable that in middle-class minds Chartism as a movement should be identified with infidelity. Yet there were many Chartists who, while despising the churches, held their own interpretation of Christianity. They laid all the emphasis upon the social obligations of Jesus' teachings. The view point of one Chartist is typical, "if one thing is more certain than another, it is this, that it is the duty of Christians to labour for the welfare of their fellowmen." Thus it was not more churches that England needed, but an "increase of pure, practical and undefiled religion." Such Chartists had no greater love for Nonconformity than for the Church of England. Nonconformists, they believed, were hopelessly preoccupied with the squabbles over doctrine and church government, and indifferent to the oppression of those outside their circle.

> What the Chartists wanted to see on the part of professing Christians was some practical demonstration of the social teachings of Christ, which should take the form of an effort to improve their lot. Nor was it charity they demanded so much as justice. Christ and Christianity to them mean the "lifting of heavy burdens and bringing them freedom and justice as well as soup-tickets and tracts.[68]

Yet, even if the Chartists could have persuaded the churches that their movement was not wholly infidel, it would not have been difficult on many other grounds for the churches to have excused their non-participation. As it is, the middle-class vested-interests of Nonconformity found one of their most

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[68]Ibid, p. 21.

specious rationalizations in the general belief that "it was wrong," for a Christian to meddle in political matters. In 1841, concerning the redress of civil grievances, the editor of The Congregationalist states, "Christian ministers have no special concern, and the Christian churches and congregations as such, no proper concern at all."[69] This is indicative of the general feeling which existed about the impropriety of church participation in politics. Such a viewpoint was anathema to the Chartists, and greatly sharpened their conflict with organized religion particularly in view of their realization that Dissenting churches had never shrunk from embroiling themselves in politics when the motive was to further their own interest.

Faulkner devotes a whole page to a list of abusive epithets which the Chartist newspapers from time to time hurled at the State Church. But Dissent also came in for attack and the extreme hostility, particularly of Wesleyanism, brought down thunders of denunciation. The Wesleyan Conference is described as a "solemn hypocritical conclave," and Methodist preachers as "afraid of liberty in all its forms."

Such opinions as these, while they may be taken to express the attitude of the Chartists toward the Church and not to prove the Church was guilty of all the charges heaped upon it, are nevertheless a fair indication that the Church as a whole did not look kindly upon the principles and practice of Chartism.

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[69]John Waddington, Congregational History, 1800-1850. (London: _____, 1878), p. 573.

In many places, Chartists themselves set up their own churches for the purpose of confounding accusations of infidelity and of getting back to fundamental Christian principles. These churches met with great success, but of course were condemned by all the denominations.

Not even those aspects of Chartist ideals which were concerned with education, teetotalism, criminal reform, the welfare of women, and the wrongness of war, prevented the whole Chartist program from being regarded "with horror and disgust," and by "highly respectable and most pious folk, as vulgar and disreputable."[70]

When the attitude of Dissent to the Chartist movement comes to be investigated in greater detail, the record is found to be one of general disapproval, while in nearly all denominations, individual parsons stand out fearlessly as champions of Chartist aims and principles.

It must be said however, that even in those few cases where ministers and clergymen were favourable to the aims of Chartism, many of them withdrew their active support when the advocates of physical force gained the upper hand soon after the movement became organized in 1838.[71] In the previous year Feargus O'Connor had founded the London Democratic Association which quickly became the mouthpiece of the physical force Chartists. Not long after its formation, The London Democrat declared:

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[70]Faulkner, op. cit., p. 57.

[71]Ibid, p. 112.

> In the Democratic Association, the Jacobin Club again lives and flourishes, and the villainous tyrants shall find to their cost, that England too has her Marats, St. Justs, and Robespierres.[72]

In the face of such pointed references and warnings as these, it is not surpising that many parsons who were sympathetic toward the political aims of Chartism, were nevertheless unwilling to risk in England the same upheavals and miseries which had accompanied the French Revolution. Moreover, they had good reason to be afraid of Church and Government reprisals for being associated with such a movement.

The main branches of Nonconformity may be roughly tabled in a descending order according to the virulence of their antagonism to the Chartist movement.

The most uncompromising in their hostility were the Methodists. The Congregationalists and Baptists maintained a more or less aloof antipathy while the Unitarians were the most favorably inclined to the reformers.

From what is known of these denominations, there is nothing of surprise to be found in the stand which they took, except perhaps in the case of the Methodists. More than any other branch of Dissent, the Methodists drew their membership from the lower middle classes and the working classes, so that it is not strange to find large numbers of individual Methodists supporting Chartism. One would naturally suppose therefore, that if the Methodist organization was democractic, official Methodism would be on the side of reform. But this was

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[72]No. 2. 1839. quoted in Frank F. Rosenblatt, The Chartist Movement, Its Social and Economic Aspects (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916) p. 111.

not so, one of the chief reasons being that the Methodist tradition was one of autocratic Toryism almost as despotic as that of the Church of England itself. Its government was Episcopalian in form, and power was wielded almost exclusively by the Conference. Democracy was neither practiced nor believed in. In fact, from time to time, the unsuccessful agitations of those who sought to introduce more democratic measures resulted in secessions which to this day have not been completely recovered. In 1849, for example, the denial by Jabez Bunting of the right of free speech led to a membership loss of 100,000 and a financial loss of 100,000 in three years. All of the secessions were the result of political and administrative disagreements, not doctrinal.

Such a distrust of democratic methods was part and parcel of the Methodist body's legacy of extreme political conservatism of which Wesley had been the uncompromising originator. His nineteenth century disciples deviated so little from the Tory persuasions of their deceased leader that the Methodist Church was found to be the only branch of Dissent which would not support the Anti-Corn Law Movement. Thus a Methodist Conference whose chairman, Jabez Bunting, could voice such passionate sentiments as "Methodism hates democracy as much as it hates sin," [73] was not likely to look with much favour upon a movement tinged with infidelity and whose aims were avowedly democratic. It surely must have caused the Wesleyan hierarchy some searchings of heart and mind, that during the ten-year period of Chartist

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[73] Faulkner, op. cit., p.85.

agitation (1838-1848), the membership of the seceding and far more democratic body of Primitive Methodists more than doubled, while in the years of 1837, 1842, and 1848, that of the parent body decreased.

As Faulkner points out,

> the great agitations within the Church ran parallel with the democratic movements in secular policies and the most serious of all with the Chartist movement which undoubtedly influenced it.[74]

It would be possible, ad infinitum, to cite illustrations of the scathing abuse of Charism which poured from a multitude of Methodist mouths and pens. Such allusions as "the ravings of lawless democrats," "disloyal and disaffected men," "insurrectionary anarchists," "dissatisfied murmurers," and "infidelity and democracy convert human beings into fiends," were typical of the language which was used; and always the accusers seemed to be totally unable to distinguish between democracy and infidelity.[75]

It must be admitted that while the leadership and most of the ordinary ministers were reactionary there were signs of a strong democratic spirit moving among the laity. But the laity was prevented from making its influence felt because of the undemocratic mode of church government. The only possible method of protest was secession, and it is interesting to note that in 1849, when one of the largest withdrawals occurred, the

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[74] Ibid, p. 86.

[75] Antagonisms were by no means softened by such Chartist counter battle cries as "More pigs and fewer persons."

methods of protest which were used, strongly resembled those of the Chartists themselves. The "Peoples' Declaration" of demands, the slogans and devices of securing popular support, were all Chartist in character. Moreover the seceders were denounced by Bunting and his followers with typical anti-Chartist abuse. They were reviled in such terms as "worldly politicians" and "notoriously ungodly men," "Red Republicans," and "Chartists." Reference was made to the most unchristian means of calling "public meetings, composed of all classes of the British community."

But no such charges as these could frighten into obedience, men and women who believed that despotism contradicted the will of God and the spirit of Jesus, ecclesiastical, no less than secular, theological no less than political. The ideals of liberty and freedom received practical assent in the newly constituted Methodist offshoots, and the spirit of Chartism itself survived that movement's demise, for by the early years of the next century, every demand of the Peoples' Charter except annual Parliaments, had been incorporated into the law of the land.

Something must be said about the contribution of individual Methodists to the Chartist cause. Among several who were prominent, perhaps the most outstanding was the Rev. J. R. Stephens. A violent revolutionary and protagonist for the people, he himself, strangely enough, was a Tory and not a member of the Chartists at all. Being expelled in 1834 from the Methodist Church for his "subversive" activities, 800 of his followers seceded with him. Stephens was the editor of a radical

paper, The Champion, and in both writing and speaking pleaded the cause of working men with power and temerity. His attacks upon the clergy were bitter, as for example:

> Instead of pleading the cause of the poor they have joined the league against them. They have shared in the murderous assault and are dividing the spoil.[76]

In 1839, his eloquence was temporarily silenced by an imprisonment of eighteen months for using seditious language. Upon his release he returned to preaching at Ashton-under-Lyne, but remained active in social work for the rest of his life.

While the record of the Congregationalists in their relationship with Chartism does not exhibit the complete hostility of the Methodists, it follows the same kind of pattern. This was only to be expected, for although Independency did not pursue the same policy of high Toryism, its membership was drawn more exclusively from the upper strata of the middle classes.

As a general rule, Official circles were conservative, while individual ministers and the laity showed a growing, but cautious sympathy for Chartism. A good illustration of this latter tendency is seen in the support which Dissenting clergy gave to the aims of the Complete Suffrage Movement, whose objective had appeared as one of the six demands of the Charter in 1837. It is reported that "nearly, if not more, than two hundred ministers of religion, of almost all denominations have signed the declaration of Memorial."[77] While this is not important in itself--for the signers were not bound to active support,

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[77]Ibid, p. 96.

nor did most of them give it--it does testify to the growth of a more tolerant and warm-hearted attitude.

In face of the reactionary outlook of the majority, a small number of Congregationalist radicals, unable any longer to acquiesce in the "betrayal of their sacred trust," took the bold step in 1841 of starting a newspaper to be devoted to the advancement of progressive policies. The leader of the group and editor of the newspaper--The Nonconformist--was Edward Miall, whose brillant editorials soon achieved great influence. They were enthusiastically welcomed both by the Chartist press and the Complete Suffrage Movement.

The policies of Edward Miall and his followers were regarded unfavourably by the chief executives at denominational headquarters. From the very first, although in full support of Miall's agitation for disestablishment, official Congregationalism disliked his other radical ideas. This was not surpising. In the first issue of the new journal, Miall declared that "Dissenters...must aim not so much to right themselves as to right Christianity;"[78] and later,

> We solemnly arraign the body of Dissenting ministers in England at the bar of truth....We charge the body of Dissenting ministers with unfaithfulness to sacred principles, evasion of a noble mission and seeming recklessness of all the mighty interests at issue.[78]

Vehement opposition to The Nonconformist came from the Congregational Magazine, and an additional periodical, the British Quarterly Review was started by the conservative Congrega-

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[78]Henry Clarke, History of English Nonconformity (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913) Vol. II, p. 413.

tionalists for the propagation of Tory viewpoints.

The attitude of the majority of those in this denomination who were opposed to the radical causes which Miall espoused is well diagnosed by R. W. Dale:

> The leading Congregationalist with very few exceptions were Whigs--faithful followers of the House of Russell, satisfied with the measure of Parliamentary reform which had been achieved in 1832.[79]

This is a testimony to the narrow self-interests of a denomination whose perspective of justice was out of focus. It cared only for the injustices of which the members of its own social class were the victims, and its only task was to fight doggedly to rid itself of every vestige of disability. Because Edward Miall's allegiance to his Faith led him to demand liberty and freedom not only for a section of the people, but for all, he brought upon himself the "distrust and dislike" of those who were friends and fellow-Christians. Nevertheless, this fearless and brilliant champion of the people's rights made a profound impression upon some of the younger and more militant Congregationalists and also upon the Baptists.

The Baptists were much more sympathetic toward radical movements than were either of the other two denominations. While the denomination as such did not openly declare itself to be on the side of the Chartists, many prominent Baptists such as Dr. Steane, took the lead in giving aid to the movement, and did not apparently suffer from official chastisement as did the Method-

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[79]R. W. Dale, History of English Congregationalism (London: Hadder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 636.

ists and Congregationalists. Incidentally, two leading Chartist agitators became ministers of the Baptist Church.

A large percentage of Unitarians were favourable to the Chartists' aims, although many of them took the view that the achievement of universal suffrage before there had been an improvement in general education, would be a mistake. In most matters, Unitarians possessed extremely broad, tolerant, and progressive opinions--an attitude which proved very popular with the Chartists, and will account for the fact that Rev. Henry Solly and the Rev. Joseph Barker who were both leading Chartists, deserted the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist connection respectively, for Unitarianism.

As for the Quakers, they were a religious body which in proportion to their numbers had a more enviable record of "social Christianity" than any other branch of organized religion, but they were always hesitant to enter the realm of politics itself. Nevertheless many Quakers did actively assist the crusade for the Factory Acts and for abolition of the Corn Laws. A leading Quaker, Joseph Sturge, was chosen by popular consent to direct the campaign of the Complete Suffrage Union--a movement which worked in close alliance with the Chartists. The famous Parliamentarian and Quaker, John Bright, was actively assocated with him in this work. But the chief contribution of the Quakers to social welfare has traditionally been outside the political arena, in the realm of compassionate philanthropy.

The record of the churches and their attitude toward Chartism is not good. By and large they were strongholds of

theological and political conservatism. If they did not express open hostility to the movement, they remained coldly disdainful. As far as the Dissenters were concerned, they were in the firm grip of the Middle-class ideology, and did not seem to be able to overcome the habit of forming their opinions of men and movements in terms of narrow-class interest. Of course, as we have seen, there were here and there isolated cases of Nonconformist sympathy and support, but compared with the numerical strength and influence of Nonconformity as a whole, they were negligible. There is enough evidence to show that it would be no exaggeration if the attitude of Dissent were characterized as one of blind, if not culpable, selfishness.

The remark of R. W. Dale that Dissenters were satisfied with the measure of reform achieved in 1832 is significant. In that year, by securing the franchise, the middle classes had won for themselves the possibility of one day becoming the strongest political influence in the country. This virtually happened in the Gladstone Government of 1870. Their dislike of High Toryism principally because of its alliance with the Establishment, is well-known. Their dislike of working-class aims is also a well attested fact. It is not uncharitable to think that principally as a method of advancing their own cause, they desired to unseat the Tory Alliance of Church and State from its position of control because it opposed their objectives, and also to prevent the working classes from gaining any power, because they would be hostile to religion (as it was thought) and would seek to impose an ideology which would endanger Nonconformist

middle-class interests. If Dissenters could successfully negotiate their plans, the way would be open for the realization of two aims which were dear to Nonconformists hearts--the disestablishment of the Church of England, and the stoppage of interference with economic interest by such labour movements as Trade Unions, (whose legal position was extremely precarious until 1875). That such motives as these maybe ascribed to some if not to all, of the Dissenting Churches is suggested by the Eclectic Review, a church magazine of the period, which states in 1843,

> To expect to make head against a Tory government with divided forces is chimerical; and to work for a cooperation of the industrious classes in regard to disestablishment which was also a working-class aim without an equitable regard for their claims is to insure ourselves of defeat and ruin.[80]

The attitude of the Church towards Chartism appears to be even more unfortunate when it is considered that the movement, unlike those which opposed it, did not seek to rest its case solely on those injustices oppressing the particular class of people represented.

Many of its leaders were passionate advocates of universal and secular education, teetotalism, pacifism, and the abolition of capital punishment. With progressive views of this kind, the Chartists were in advance of popular sentiment. If the Dissenting churches had not been labouring under what Engels called the "religious bigotry, and stupidity of the English respectable middle class"[81] and had taken the lead in bringing about

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[80]Faulkner, op. cit., p. 116.

[81]Ibid, p. 12.

--either in company with the Chartists or without them--a Christian social regeneration of economic and political life, the reforms which it took fifty years to achieve might have been accomplished in far less time. From the religious standpoint one of the less important results of this would probably have been that many of the evils attendant upon a competitive capitalist system of the kind which operated in nineteenth century England would have disappeared before the outbreak of World War I, enabling the nation to emerge from both World War I and World War II with far greater economic stamina.

More importantly, from the religious point of view, Nonconformity would have broken away from the iron chains of a middle-class ideology; it would have escaped the accusation of Miall that it was "essentially the Christianity developed by a middle-class soil," and as such "fast decaying" and "void of efficiency." The Free Churches would have certainly succeeded more surely in gaining the confidence, good will, and perhaps the religious allegiance of the working people, and if this had happened, their power and prestige would not have declined so grievously in company with the falling fortunes of political Liberalism. In this mid-twentieth century, therefore, the Nonconformist churches might have been enjoying a spiritual vigor imparted to them by the middle classes and the proletariat together with the result that they would now wielding the social and religious influence of practical Christianity instead of being regarded by vast multitudes in all the orders of society, as a relic of Victorian anti-progressive and hypocritical religiosity.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL ACTION OF NONCONFORMITY

The meagerness of the data in the field of Nonconformity's positive contribution to a Christian social order will necessarily limit the scope of this chapter.

It has already been suggested that the unique character of the Free Churches together with their intense preoccupation with matters which directly affected their own existence and prestige, deprived them of an acute sensitiveness to the degenerate ethicways of the social and economic order. Indeed, it can be shown that because the Church refused to accept its social responsibilities, it not only impeded the emancipation of the oppressed classes, but threw the whole reform movement into the hands of those who cared little for organized religion, and created for untold future generations of Nonconformists the legacy of an alienated working class. This fact alone, of course, does not account for the indifference shown toward Nonconformity by the great mass of people in England today, but it is by no means inoperative amid the multiplicity of causes.

The Churches woke up to their mistake, almost too late to retrieve its unfortunate results. As Raymond V. Holt remarks:

> It was not until the twentieth century that the churches as such became conscious of their responsibilities for the social order.[82]

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[82] Raymond V. Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1938), p. 212.

Some of the reasons why the Church was not alive to the all-embracing demands of the Christian ethic, are given in previous chapters. These are not entirely pre-conceived assumptions, but are the result of investigations subsequent to the discovery of what the Nonconformist Churches did or did not do to help create a Christian social order. Those results constitute the reasons for what they did not do, and will now provide the context in which the positive contributions of Nonconformity must be understood. No attempt will be made to thrust the findings into the mould already created, but it will be found that they fit, and that nineteenth century Nonconformity did nothing incompatible with the character which has been diagnosed for it in the foregoing chapters. If it had, then the diagnosis would have been different.

None of the evidence adduced in this chapter therefore, will occasion any surprise, and the positive contribution of most denominations will either be in line with self-interest, or possibly motivated by that feeble flicker of social conscience which amid all the multiferious and choking engrossments of Nonconformity still found space enough to burn.

One of the most remarkable facts which immediately stands out is that the denominations which concerned themselves most with the evils of the social order were both the smallest in numbers and the most liberal theologically, namely, the Society of Friends, and the Unitarians.

It is no coincidence that books have been published dealing specifically with both Quaker and Unitarian contributions

to social progress.[83] As far as can be discovered, nothing has been written in the same field concerning the work of the Congregationalists, Baptists, or Presbyterians. Several books have dealt with the early social ethic of Methodism and its attitude to early agitations for reform, but none has addressed itself to any creative or distinctive work in this particular area of activity.

The reason for this apparent lack is not far to seek, for the subject matter for such books is almost entirely non-existent. H. W. Clarke in his definitive History of English Nonconformity[84] deplores the fact that the Nonconformist ideal has been conceived only in terms of the struggle for religious liberty,[85] but he nowhere suggests that it should have broadened out to include the whole gamut of social and economic life. Movements like Chartism, Christian Socialism, and names of such pioneers as Robert Owen, are never mentioned, nor are the working classes spoken of at all, while over eighty pages are devoted to a narrative of the struggle for religious equality during the nineteenth century. There can be little doubt where the heart of Nonconformity lay.

In 1907, the History of English Congregationalism by R. W. Dale was published posthumously. This is a monumental work

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[83] Ibid, and Auguste Jorns, The Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work, tr. Thomas Kite Brown, Jr. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931.)

[84] (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913).

[85] Ibid, p. 308 ff. His definition of the Nonconformist ideal is that, organization can only act to the profit of life as it is itself the product of an antecedent life and reacts upon the life which has produced it. Vol. II, p. 309.

of 750 pages. Nineteenth century Congregationalism is dealt with in about 150 pages, but no hint is given anywhere but that, apart from their religious disabilities the Congregationalists thought of the economic laissez-faire of the nineteenth century as constituting the "best of all possible worlds." No notice whatever is taken of the unemployment, squalor, starvation and disease of the working classes nor their agitations for reform, nor therefore, is any word of explanation given as to the reasons why Congregationalism held itself aloof from, and hostile to, the efforts of the working classes to improve their sorry condition.

True, a whole chapter is devoted to "National Education," but we find that the quarrels of Dissent with the Establishment long prevented the provision of elementary education for all, and that at length the ire of Nonconformity was roused when it saw the probability of the whole secular education being brought under the control of the Church of England.

It might be supposed that Dale's chapter on "Institutions and Enterprises of Modern Congregationalism" would at least contain some hint that the denomination was aware of a social problem and was doing something creative to assist the unemployed and the working poor. But this is not the case. The "enterprises and institutions" consist of the erection of new theological colleges, schools for the sons of Congregational ministers, chapel building societies, provident societies and the like. As far as the "social gospel" is concerned, the one small redeeming feature of this book are the few paragraphs describing

the work of individual Congregational Churches in maintaining so-called "settlements" in the poverty stricken areas of big cities. These, however, were largely evangelical and paternalistic, encouraging thrift and giving moral guidance. "With poverty as poverty," says Dale, "the Settlements do not profess to deal; they are civilizing, not relieving agencies." Then, he says "The Churches are beginning to understand that they must go out to the masses before they can hope to see the masses coming in to them."[86] Here perhaps at last is the glimmering realization by one of the most distinguished Congregationalist of all time that the nineteenth century church had been unaware of its vital mission, and had belied in its living the spirit and purpose of the great Master, it professed to serve.

Now, even though the record of Dissent in our field of inquiry is so scant, it must in all fairness be put down, and as has already been indicated, will result in high-lighting the activities of the Quakers, Unitarians, and later on those of the Salvation Army. The first area of social activity which will be considered is that of education.

The Spread of Education

At the opening of the nineteenth century, and for a long time afterwards, the growing population of England was largely illiterate. To be able to read or write was the sign of gentlemanly breeding. In the large towns, there usually ex-

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[86]R. W. Dale, History of English Congregationalism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907) p. 744.

isted two kinds of educational establishment. There were the "endowed" schools, generally attached to some ancient religious foundation, such as the St. Albans School which celebrated its 1000th anniversary in 1948. The original purpose of such schools was to provide education for the children of the poor, but most of them now catered only to the sons of the well-to-do. The only chance of the poor for education was to be had at the "dame schools" which were often kept by persons with but little more education than the students themselves. The education of village children was nearly always carried out by the local clergyman.

But even if instruction had been on the highest level, there were two reasons why the majority of English children would have remained unschooled. In the first place, if schooling was was desired, it had to be paid for, which most families were unable to do.[87] And secondly, vast numbers of children worked throughout the day, often seven days a week, at the factories and in the fields.

Thomas Malthus[88] the "population expert", makes the following observation in the year 1803:

> It is surely a great national disgrace that the education of the lower classes of people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday Schools supported by a subscription from individuals, who, of course, can give to the course of instruction in them, any kind of bias which they please.[89]

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[87]The S.P.C.K. had been founded in 1698, but had only 2000 schools in which no secular subjects were taught. Also they instruction was intensely anti-Nonconformist.

[88]See Page 45.

[89]T. R. Malthus, An Essay on the Principle of Population. (Georgetown: 1809) (1st American Ed. from 3rd London Ed.) ii, 413 (Vol. 2, Book 4, Chap. 8) quoted in Auguste Jorns, op. cit., p. 121.

A Quaker publication, The Philanthropist, estimates the number of children in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about two million and in London fifty thousand, of whom it says, "more than half grow up to an adult state, without any instruction at all, in the grossest ignorance, and without any useful impression of religion or morality."[90]

At this time, the State took no responsibility for the education for either adults or children, and although representatives of the various branches of Dissent made valient efforts to fill the gap, the fact that the above observations could be made at the turn of the century, was indicative of the inadequacy of their endeavour.

One of the first denominations to achieve some success in the field of education, was the Quakers. By 1801, they had Sunday Schools, Adult Schools, and Lancaster Schools already in operation. The most famous of these was of course the Lancaster School, founded by Joseph Lancaster, (1778-1828). In 1801, at the age of eighteen, Lancaster had established a primitive school in a barn to which over one hundred children came for regular instruction in secular subjects. The school itself was undenominational--a fact indicated by the notice which hung outside:

> All who will, may send their children, and have them educated Freely (the expense of Writing books, excepted;) and those to whom the above offer may not prove acceptable may pay for them at a very moderate price.[91]

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[90] Ibid, p. 121.
[91] Ibid, p. 122.

The method of teaching was that which came to be known as the "monitorial system" in which the head boy or "monitor" as responsible for instructing a group of children in what he had already learned. They in turn would teach others. Reading, writing, and arthmetic, in addition to religious instruction were about all that was taught. Such a method was crude, particularly as most of the children memorized their lessons parrot-fashion, and indeed it has been denied by some that there was any advantage whatever in such a system of education. But even if this be true, the fact that ignorance was regarded by many Nonconformists as a social evil, and that they tried to do something about it, was a progressive step.

By 1812, it was estimated that several hundred of the lancaster schools existed. They received high commendation from the King downward throughout the land, and many of the wealthy contributed to their upkeep, including Robert Owen who in 1810, gave 250 pounds. By this time, the administration of the schools was in the hands of a "Committee for Promoting the Royal Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor," which in 1808 came to be known as the British and Foreign School Society.

Representatives of both the Quakers and Methodists in the persons of Samuel Fox and William Singleton, respectively, combined to start the Adult School Movement in 1798, which for many years, remained the almost exclusive preserve of the Quakers. Some of the first were set up primarily for women, whose education was considered to be important, in view of the influence that they had for good or ill upon their husbands and children.

Writing, arithmetic, and Bible-reading were taught. There was no test of admission and the schools were undenominational.

In 1884, the Quakers agreed to amalgamate their Adult Schools with those which their example had inspired other denominations to initiate, and the subsequent National Council of Adult School Unions formed in 1889 was more than half composed of Quakers.

A similar movement of the Adult Schools was that of the Mechanics Institutes, largely under the auspices of the Unitarians. The first of these, it is claimed, was founded in connection with Rev. Joseph Priestley's church at Birmingham in 1789. From 1823, the movement spread rapidly and by 1850, there were 610 Mechanics Institutes attended by one hundred thousand persons, most of whom were working men. Unitarians were prominent both as financial contributors and as lecturers in the Institutes. It is not known how actively the other Nonconformist denominations were associated with this movement.

From about 1850 the Institutes began to decline in both influence and numbers. The elementary education of the working men did not enable them to take full advantage of the lectures, and there was found to be a growing gulf between "the ideas of the more intelligent working men, and the middle-class members of the committees" which ran the institutions.[92] Nevertheless, the Mechanics Institutes were the forerunners of such famous institutions as the Manchester School of Technology and the Birmingham Midland Institute which are flourishing to this day.

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[92]Holt, op. cit., p. 269.

Returning now to the question of elementary day-school education; up to 1840 the field was divided almost equally between the British and Foreign School Society and the "National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church." This latter Society was founded in 1811 to carry out the task its title indicates.

Representatives of all Nonconformist denominations combined to secure the maintenance of the British Schools, "But," said Dale, "on several critical occasions it has been their duty in the interests of religious liberty, to offer the most vigorous opposition to measures which had for their object the extension and improvement of elementary education."[93] Thus there begins the creeping shadow of that conflict of the Dissenters with the government over national education, which reached its full height in the Forster Education Act of 1870.

By 1820, all parties appreciated that the advance of the Industrial Revolution had made the volunatry and privately supported system of education totally inadequate to meet the growing needs for office workers and others possessed of special skills. In that same year, a government inquiry revealed that 3,500 parishes had unendowed schools and 3,000 had no educational facilities at all. Henry Brougham, a Whig, and friend of the Nonconformists, introduced a Bill into the Commons proposing a scheme of universal education which should be virtually under the control of the Church of England. Immediately, all Nonconformists rose in horror at the prospect, and by the onslaught of mammoth petitions, the Bill was eventually killed, and heard of no more.

[93] Dale, op. cit., p. 647.

For the next twenty years until 1840, the question of national universal education was shelved by the government, largely because it could devise no way of setting up a national scheme which would satisfy both the Church of England and Nonconformity at the same time. The enmity between these two bodies succeeded in keeping the masses in ignorance for two generations longer. Meanwhile the government adopted an ineffectual compromise. It provided a grant of £20,000 a year to both the National Society and the British Schools. But the money was awarded in proportion to the amount the two societies could raise themselves. Therefore, the growth of the National Society with the wealth of the Establishment behind it soon outstripped that of the British Schools.

Because of this there was growing alarm among Nonconformists, which increased when, in 1840, Sir James Graham introduced a Bill proposing compulsory schooling for all children in manufacturing districts, that it be undenominational, but under the control of the local clergy. Nonconformist hostility to such a measure was so great that the Bill was withdrawn with the result that there was still no system of universal education. It may be noted that in that year the percentage of illiterates was 41.6 (men 33.7 and women 49.5).

In view of this inability of the government to devise an educational scheme acceptable both to Anglicans and Dissenters, many Free Church people came to believe that it should not be within the province of government to provide education for its citizens. The Congregational Union in 1843 adopted a resolution

to the effect that

> This meeting therefore concludes without despondency or regret that both the general and the religious education of the people of England must be chiefly provided and conducted by the voluntary efforts of the various denominations of Christians.[94]

It is apparent that the Congregationalists were alive to their responsibilities for the education of the masses, even though State Aid was repudiated. A Committee of General Education was established and the renowned John Angell James of Birmingham expressed the view point of most Nonconformists when he said:

> we have defeated a great measure whether for good or harm, it was a gigantic proposal....We are bound in honour to do all in our power to promote the education of the people.[95]

While the Baptists and Methodists supported the British Schools but did nothing as independent denominations, the Committee of General Education of the Congregational Church raised nearly 174,000 between 1843-1859, in addition to funds raised and spent locally, for the erection of denominational day schools.

All branches of Dissent, however, while coming more and more to adopt the principle of Voluntaryism, especially in the matter of religious education, manifested a deeply growing concern over the tendency of the Church of England to extend its influence over the nation's children by means of the fact that the method of administering the government educational grants

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[94]Congregational Magazine, 1843, n.s. vii, 842-843, quoted in Ibid, p. 661.

[95]Ibid, p. 839.

worked in favour of the National Society.

Yet, many of the younger Nonconformists who had graduated at the new non-sectarian University of London were dissatisfied, and while they did not believe that the State had any right to teach religion, they were vehement in denying the right of the Establishment to teach subjects which had nothing to do with religion.

Such an argument found reinforcement in the fact that the growing power and wealth of the National Society made it increasingly difficult for the British Schools to maintain themselves; and indeed, many were forced to close because of their inability to compete with the superior instruction the National Society was able to provide.

Between 1850 and 1870, the situation moved gradually toward a climax. Every Bill which was introduced into Parliament proposing a solution to the problem was wrecked upon the same rock of offence--the Nonconformist conviction that education is incomplete without religious education, that it should be given by the schoolmaster in the day schools, and if religious instruction is given in the schools, they should not be State aided.

As early as 1850, Lord Arundel had expressed in shocking terms the unenlightened and prejudice attitude of the Government toward the uncompromising stand of the Nonconformists:

> The two armies are drawing up their forces, and the battle is now between religion and irreligion, the Church and infidelity, God and the Devil, and

> the reward for which they must contend is Heaven or Hell.[96]

When the second Reform Bill of 1867 became law, the working classes, now enfranchised, acquired a powerful instrument for the articulation of their grievances, and all parties were impressed with the absolute necessity of contriving a workable scheme of compulsory national education.

The tide of Nonconformist sentiment now turned, and largely under Free Church auspices, the National Education League was founded in Birmingham in 1869. It's avowed object was "the establishment of a system which shall secure the education of every child in the country." Religious instruction was to be limited to the reading of the Bible and the whole scheme was to be under the secular control of local authorities. The Conservative Party and the whole Established Church attacked the project as "godless" and rose up in fierce condemnation of it. To combat the influence of the League, they initiated a National Education Union. Nevertheless, the League won unanimous support among Nonconformists, except for a few surrounding the celebrated champion of Voluntaryism, Mr. Edward Baines.

Joseph Chamberlain, the great Unitarian statesman made his political debut by pleading the cause of universal nonsectarian compulsory education. He worked indefatigably on behalf of the League, as did Dr. Henry William Crosskey, minister of the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, Birmingham, of which Chamberlain was a member. Another prominent and most vigorous sup-

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[96]Dale, op. cit., p. 671.

porter was Dr. R. W. Dale of the Carr's Lane Congregational Church, Birmingham.

The rivalry between the National League and the National Union grew so intense, the government realized its continuance would inflame prejudices to such an extent that any kind of Education Bill whatever would stand little chance of getting through Parliament. Accordingly in 1870, Mr. W. E. Forster, Vice-President of the Council in the Gladstone Government introduced a Bill proposing to establish School Boards in districts where educational facilities were deficient, unless the deficiency was remedied within twelve months by the denominations themselves. In addition, the School Boards were to have power to compel the attendance of children between the ages of five and twelve.

Although this Act paid deference to the demands of the National League, the Nonconformists regarded it as a half-hearted measure and resisted its passage. They were specially insensed over the fact that according to the provisions of the Bill, the School Boards were empowered to enforce denominational instruction of the strictest type, nothwithstanding the Cowper-Temple conscience clause which allowed parents on religious grounds to withdraw their children from religious instruction provided the objection was sent in writing to the headmaster of the school.

Nonconformists condemned the Act at once and at Birmingham a Central Nonconformist Committee was set up to make the protests effective. Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Unitarians and several branches of Methodism all ranged them-

selves in opposition. Dr. Crosskey and Dr. Dale, together with Edward Miall in the House, were active in drafting amendments. Passionate meetings and debates took place. The outcome of it all was that when the Bill was finally passed, the Nonconformists received some partially-satisfying concessions. Parents who did not wish their children to receive religious instruction were saved from having to state their objections in writing.

It was also provided that "no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught" in any school provided by the School Board. But this provision did not cover denominational schools, whose existence remained untouched. The fact that these sectarian schools were still allowed to function was the chief resentment that Nonconformists had. For in them, the principle of denominationalism remained unassailed. Not only did the Act leave the responsibility for the education of large sections of the population in the hands of the Church of England, but by means of the provision allowing new denominational schools to be started in the six-month period after the act became law, actually encouraged the principle of denominational education. Resentment flared up even more when it was discovered that during those six months, three-fourths of the grant-applications for building new Denominational schools came from the Establishment. Such non-cooperation by the Church of England with the Dissenters in the spirit of the Act, was regarded by many as an indecent manifestation of sharp practice.

Even after the amended Act became law, the Free Churches

kept up a violent barrage of remonstrance, but all to no avail, and the educational system there laid down remained in force until the revisions initiated by Lord Balfour in 1902. It is precisely at this point that the first rift between Nonconformity and political Liberalism with which it had almost come to be identified, appears.

From this time onward, the direct political influence of Nonconformity began to wane. As Dale declares in connection with this very issue:

> Nonconformists broke out into open revolt against the Liberal party; and this revolt was one of the principal causes of the Liberal defeat in the General Election of 1874.[97]

Dr. Dale describes the Education Act of 1870 as a "heavy blow to religious liberty,", and presages the widening gulf between Nonconformity and the Liberal Party with these words:

> The Liberal Government of 1870 might have arrested the development of an educational system which placed the majority of the schools receiving aid from the State under the power of the clergy; they might have secured the rapid growth of a system founded upon more equitable principles; but their courage failed them. They were more anxious to conciliate their political opponents than to be loyal to their political friends; and within four years they had to bear the penalty of their unfaithfulness.[98] (at which time the Conservatives were returned to power.)

The question as to whether this national education crisis was instrumental in bringing the Nonconformists at last to see the folly of being so closely allied with one particular class and party, or whether the fall of the Liberal Government in

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[97] Ibid, p. 683.
[98] Ibid, p. 683.

1874 was brought about by the vindictive resentment of Nonconformity, is not one which can be considered here. One thing is certain however, and that is that from this period of Nonconformist-Liberal disruption in the 1870's, the steady decline of political Liberalism runs almost parallel to that of Nonconformity itself.

The story of Nonconformist participation in the development of national education, cannot be separated from that of its struggle to rid itself of political and religious disabilities. Throughout the nineteenth century, in keeping with its stated desire to break the power of the Church of England, a Dissenting leadership had adroitly checkmated most of the moves which Anglicanism made to extend its influence in the field of education. The struggle was waged through the rival organizations of the National Society and the British Schools, which latter were supported with particular eagerness by the Congregationalists and Baptists. Dr. Dale tells us immediately that

> Congregationalists were among the most ardent advocates of popular education at a time when large and powerful classes of English society were sincerely afraid that if the children of the great masses of the people were taught to read and write they would become a serious peril to the State.[99]

It is pertinent to ask what the real reasons were for the apparent anxiety of the Nonconformists that the injustice of compulsory ignorance should be lifted from the shoulders of the masses. No similar qualms were felt about such injustices as compulsory child labour, compulsory over work, and compulsory undernourishment. If they were not recognized as such, then it is all the

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[99] Ibid, p. 646.

more important to know why the need for education was recognized and singled out as an objective of endeavour. Why did Nonconformity not pssess the same fear as the other "powerful classes of English society" that widespread education would assist the subversive aims of the underprivileged who would then be better equipped to imperil the State?

Can the explanation of all this be that the reason why Nonconformity so zealously pursued an enlightened policy in the field of education, was not that the movement was prompted by the stirrings of a genuine social conscience, but rather that it was all part of the great struggle to guard its own interests, and to extend its own liberties by counteracting the proselytizing efforts of the Church of England in the education of the young?

If Nonconformity could secure the adherence of the nation's children, then its future as the dominant religious organization in England, would be assured. Was that the incentive? Was it self interest or public welfare, hatred of the Church of England or love of the common people, which motivated the educational activities of Dissent? Whichever it was in the early years of the century, there seems to be no doubt that in the period immediately preceeding 1870 and after, in spite of the bickering obstinancies of both sides, and in spite of the justified stand of the Free Churches against Establishmentarian control of education, the social conscience of Nonconformity had really been roused. In pressing so untiringly for completely non-sectarian compulsory education for all, and in showing a

willingness to give up their special denominational control of the schools they had founded, the Free Churches displayed a public interest and a Christian social spirit which not only showed the Church of England in very poor light, but was a happy omen for the broadening interest in social affairs which gradually developed in the churches of the twentieth century.

The Abolition of Slavery

As far as the public manifestation of a social conscience is concerned, the agitation for the abolition of slavery is the saving grace of Nonconformity in the early years of the nineteenth century. In this area of inquiry, the literature is as voluminous as, in the other areas of Free Church concern for social evils, it is slight. Whereas, it was to take from 50 to 100 years for the churches to recognize as such, many of the widespread injustices in their own country, they were so much alive to the anti-Christian character of slavery, that by the turn of the century, a vigorous campaign was being waged for its destruction by all branches of organized religion except High Anglicanism.

As early as 1688, 69 years after the first slaves had been imported into the British Colonies of North America, a Quaker preacher had made the first public protest against Negro slavery. Yet it was not until 1761 that the Quaker movement in Britain decided to expel all slave-holders from its membership.[100]

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a growing

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[100]Jorns, op. cit., p. 208.

volume of sentiment both outside the church and within it, in favour of complete emancipation. One of the causes of this was the influence of Rousseau and Montesquieu in the widespread dissemination of their idealization of primitive peoples.

Yet the genesis of the anti-slavery movement is to be found within the social conscience of organized Dissent. Throughout the anti-slavery campaign, although all Nonconformist bodies gave support, the Quakers were always foremost in their leadership. The year 1766, saw the publication of Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies on the Calamitous State of Enslaved Negroes," of which "600 copies were sent to members of both Houses of Parliament." This was the work of the Quaker, Anthony Benezet (1713-1784).

In 1774, Wesley officially committed his movement to the banishment of slavery, and condemned it as the "most pestilential of all evils." Nine years later, the Quakers presented the first petition of its kind to Parliament entitled, "The Case of our Fellow Creatures, the Oppressed Africans," and begged for abolition. In 1788, the same year that slavery was outlawed in the British Isles, the famous Unitarian minister and chemist, Joseph Priestley, preached a widely distributed sermon advocating emancipation. The Congregationalists and Baptists voiced their growing hostility to the trade, and the "Clapham Sect,"--a branch of the Evangelicals--from which William Wilberforce himself came, were vociferously pro-abolitionist.

Outside the church itself, such renowned public figures as Samuel Johnson, Thomas Paine, and Adam Smith--men of widely

different backgrounds and belief could combine in declaring that slavery was "contrary to the light of nature, to every pinciple of Justice and humanity, and even good policy."

The anti-slavery movement as such came into formal existence in 1787, when a Committee of twelve was formed whose members were dedicated to promote, with the help of Wilberforce, anti-slavery legislation in Parliament. This committee was subsequently named the Society for the abolition of the Slave Trade. The intense practical concern for the Quakers--of whom only fifteen thousand existed in England at that time--for human welfare is symbolized by the fact that only three members of this Anti-Slavery Committee were not Quakers--They were Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and Philip Sansom; the measures recommended were as follows:

1. Absolute prohibition of further importation of slaves.

2. Emancipation of all present slaves as soon as their purchase price and cost of training can be met.

3. Settling of Freed Slaves in the colonies where they will maintain themselves by cultivating their own farms, or by selling their labour to whites

4. The plantation owners to be reimbursed if necessary from public funds

Before Parliament opened in 1788, 103 Petitions had been received from "Friends of the Unfortunate Africans," and the Society had made special campaign propaganda from the fact that the terrible hardships of the voyage to America resulted not only in the death of many slaves,[101] but (something far more

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[101] quite apart from deliberately inflicted torture, the

important to many people) also of English sailors. In that same year, Parliament was prevailed upon to pass a law imposing strict regulations upon the number of slaves to be carried in any one vessel. The influence of the Abolitionist Society grew by leaps and bounds. Upon this single issue the extraordinary occurence was to be witnessed of Bishops of the Established Church working in close collaboration with Dissenters. Local associations were formed in every part of England and on the Continent. Thousands of tracts were distributed and witnesses held in readiness to estify in Parlimentary hearings.

If the humane and Christian aspirations of the Society and its friends were to triumph, this extreme vigilance and aggressiveness were imperative for the forces of the anti-abolitionists represented largely by the slave-owners and by Bristol and Liverpool shipping interests, were strong. They contended that white men were unable to work in the sub-tropical climate of the West Indies; that it was impossible to keep up the number of the slaves without importing them;[102] that if England abandoned the trade, other countries would take it up; and that it was of great value to the British Navy.

The rebuttal of such arguments demanded not only the re-

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slaves had not room enough to lie down at full length alongside one another and the distance between decks was not great enough to enable them to stand upright. "On the slave ships, living men had less room, than corpses usually have in their coffins." Jorns, op. cit., p. 209.

[102] The British West Indies alone absorbed between fifteen and sixteen thousand slaves yearly. In 1800 the population was 500,000 and the white, 55,000. A. F. Fremantle, England in the nineteenth century, 1801-1805 (London: Geo. Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1929), p. 284.

iteration of Christian principles by the abolitionists, but the ability to devise workable alternatives. The overwhelming body of opinion in the country was on their side and the continued pressure of both the major part of the Church of England and the Free Churches upon the Government was at last bound to prove irresistible.

In 1805, an Order in Council forbade the importation of slaves into new conquests in the West Indies and this paved the way for the Abolition Bill itself which passed the House of Commons by a majority of 114 to 15, and became law on March 25, 1807.[103] The way was now open for the abolition of slavery itself--which came 27 years later.

The Anti-Slavery Society turned its attention with high ardor toward the task of complete emancipation. Its work was made none the easier by reason of the fact that in spite of the Act of 1807, slave trading continued almost as openly as before. Wealthy slave merchants in the West of England ports were quite willing to risk a fine--the amount of which would be much less than the profit from a single trip.[104] Partly through investigation made by the Quakers into the illegal traffic, the government passed acts in 1811 and 1819 making transportation for life the punishment for traffiking in slaves.

In 1823, a new phase began in the history of the anti-slavery movement for in that year, the "Society for the Gradual

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[103]The U.S.A. prohibited the importation of slaves by a law enacted in the same year.

[104]Immediately before prohibition, slaves had been worth 70 each.

Abolition of Slavery in Our Colonies" was founded by the Quaker, William Allen, and in addition Thomas Fowell Buxton, a former Quaker, and at that time a member of the Church of England, became the leading successor to Wilberforce.

It was Priscilla Gurney, sister of Elizabeth Fry, Buxton's sister-in-law, who persuaded him to espouse the abolitionist cause and take upon his shoulders the work of the now ageing and enfeebled Wilberforce. As the result of a petition which Wilberforce himself presented in the year 1823, the Government undertook to bring about the gradual abolition of slavery on the ground that it was contrary to the Christian religion and the constitution.

Up to this time, the Tories in the government had found themselves in a dilemma concerning their attitude to slavery. Their natural inclinations led them to abhor change, particularly if it would have the effect of reducing the national affluence. On the other hand they were reluctant to take a point of view which they knew to be out of keeping with both Church of England and Nonconformist sentiments. The result was that they adopted a neutral attitude.

But in 1823, an incident occurred which had the result of forcing the Tories to make a decision and of creating a new wave of antagonism in the nation against slavery. A Congregational missionary, John Smith, of the London Missionary Society, had been falsely accused of inciting an insurrection of slaves in Demerara. Actually, he had used his efforts to prevent the insurrection. Nevertheless, he was court-martialled and senten-

ced to death. Before the execution could be carried out, the unhealthy jail conditions in which he was confined brought on a fatal illness and he died.

This happening caused great excitement in England and in the House, Lord Brougham, traditional spokesman for Dissenters, brought a motion of censure against the Colonial government for its action. He was careful to point out that those who voted in favour of the motion would thereby declare themselves friends of the Negroes and opponents of slavery. But the motion was lost by 146 to 193, and the Tories took their stand as enemies of the Negro and supporters of slavery. In the same way the country was stirred by the persecution of abolitionist Methodist missionaries in the Barbodos Islands two years later, and again an attempt was made to censure the government for not protecting the Methodists from the hostile planters.

From this time on, with the large majority of English people behind it, the Anti-slavery Society waged an unrelenting campaign. Most of the funds were contributed by Dissenters, especially the Friends. A special newspaper, the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter published lists of approved Parliamentary candidates, which were distributed at the time of elections; outline lectures on slavery were circulated; well-known speakers toured the country enlisting the enthusiasm and assistance of the populus at great mass meetings in the chief cities, until the name of the Society became a household word and its creed was upon every lip--"To uphold slavery is a crime before God, and the conditions therefore must be immediately abolished." Men and women

of every political and religious point of view rallied to the cause of justice, yet most of the chief protagonists were drawn not from the Church of England, but from the Free Churches. The celebrated Jabez Bunting and Richard Waston were spokesman for the Methodists, Joseph Fletcher for the Congregationalists, Joseph Irimey for the Baptists. A Unitarian, M. P., William Smith, was active for the movement in the House, and was at one time, chairman of the Society itself. The Unitarian Josiah Wedgwood, famous pottery manufacturer, was also a leading figure, and the seal of the society was made at his works. It is known, moreover, that Unitarian ministers attacked the slave trade in both Bristol and Liverpool--which profited from it most. Rev. John Yates preached sermons against it in Liverpool and "gave great offence to many influential members of his congregation."[105] The numerically small Society of Friends far exceeded the other denominations in its prominent leadership in the cause. Among the most outstanding were James Crooper, William Allen, Thomas and Joseph Sturge, and Josiah Forster.

Scores of local anti-slavery societies flourished all over the country in Dissenting congregations. One of the most important and typical of these was "The Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association for the Abolition of Slavery." The position of Dissent as a whole is well summed up in the resolution adopted at this Association's first meeting in 1829:

> That slavery is an evil of fearful magnitude, directly opposed to the well-being of man, the law of God and the Religion of Christ--the exis-

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[105]Holt, op. cit., p. 135.

> tence of which, especially in any part of the British dominions, we as Christians do seriously deplore, and the entire extinction of which we feel ourselves called upon most strenuously to seek and promote....
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> That for the most part the question of Negro slavery has been approached as a political one, and assailed from arguments drawn from policy and mere expediency, and not opposed with those stronger and less equivocal principles and arguments which are to be derived from the word of God, and the supreme and immutable laws of revealed religion.[106]

The election of 1830 was a turning point in the struggle for abolition, which went hand in hand with the effort to secure domestic political reforms. The Tory government had failed to redeem its pledge to do something about easing the horrible conditions under which slaves worked, and just before Parliament dissolved[107] Lord Brougham warned the government concerning the possible results of its apathy. Said he:

> The same country is once more awake--awke to the conditions of Negro slavery; the same indignation kindles in the bosom of the same people; the same cloud is gathering that anihilated the slave trade; and it shall descend again; they on whom its crash may fall, will not be destroyed before I have warned them; but I pray that their destruction may turn away from us the more terrible judgments of God.[108]

Tremendous activity was seen on all flanks of the Nonconformist front in an endeavour to return members who would vote for abolition in Parliament. The influential Committee of Dissenting Deputies (spokesmen for the whole of Dissent) pledged

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[106]Anti-Slavery Reporter III, p. 155 quoted in Cowherd, op. cit., p. 76.

[107]The fall of the Government came when the Duke of Wellington declared he was against all reform and that no better system of government could be devised.

[108]Brougham, SpeechesI, pp. 424-428,438, quoted in Ibid.

"every assistance in its power to the Anti-Slavery Society." Official Methodism well-known for its Tory cautiousness, now reversed the decision it had made in 1825, and decided to participate in abolitionist agitation. Churches of all denominations were asked to send petitions to Parliament and by the time it met, 5, 329 had been received.

Lord Brougham and many other anti-slavery candidates were returned but the Reform Bill in which the Christian Observer saw nothing that was "unjust, inexpedient or unconstitutional", was passed by a majority of only one, and a new General Election became necessary.

Once again great mass meetings were held to maintain popular passion at a high level. A mammoth gathering took place at Exeter Hall in London, at which Rev. Daniel Wilson and Dr. Lushington moved the following resolution:

> That the time has now come in which the people of England may give by their votes, as they have already given by their petitions, efficacious assistence toward delivering the Negroes from the evils of slavery, and the nation from the guilt of tolerating it; and that the address now ready to be adopted by this meeting and circulated through the country.[109]

The Dissenters were jubliant that so many candidates favourable to the cause both of reform and abolition were returned at the polls. Even so, the reactionary character of the Peers and Bishops in the House of Lords succeeded in rejecting the Reform Bill after it had been sent up from the Commons. Dissenters realized that reform and abolition stood or fell together and the anger which was felt throughout the country broke out

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[109] Ibid, p. 93.

into severe rioting at several places. It is not known to what extent Dissenters participated.

At last in the midst of bitter Tory opposition, the Reform Bill, or as the Baptist Magazine called it, "The Magna Charta of England" was passed. It was a great triumph, and final emancipation was assured. Perhaps the popular weekly Dissenting newspaper, The Patriot, may be excused for its over optimism when it said: "the long conflict with corruption is at length over." The Free Churches and Evangelicals hoped that the first business of the Reformed Parliament would be one of "deliverance of 800,000 of our fellow subjects from cruel ignominious and unrighteous boundage."

Before the first Reform Parliament was elected, the Quaker Thomas Fowell Buxton with the support of the Dissenting Deputies, tried to rouse the Commons to vigorous action on the basis of resolutions already passed, but the effort met with little success. In the meantime, new slave insurrections had occurred in Jamaica as a result of which Dissenting missionaries had suffered persecution, and the burning of their chapels.

Before the Reform Parliament came into being the Duke of Wellington expressed extreme fears that the country would be:

> pretty equally divided between Tories on the one hand, and Whigs or Government, Radicals, Unitarians, Quakers, and Jews on the other. The latter will be strongest; God knows how the country will be governed under such circumstances.[110]

As for the Dissenters, it is recorded that in every borough they were the backbone of the majority.

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[110]Wellington, Despatches VIII, p. 426, quoted in Ibid, p.104.

In the election--the third within three years--their anti-slavery candidates were successful, and the Whig and Radical members in the persons of men like John Wilks, Joseph Brotherton, and John Wood, presented a formidable alliance. Wellington and Sir Robert Peel together lamented that the Bill had destroyed the preponderating influence of the Tories. It had been transferred to the Dissenters who are "daily deriving too much advantage from the power they have acquired to be willing to part with it or to exercise it except for the promotion of their own interests."

The day of victory for the Anti-Slavery Society and its friends was now drawing near. In what turned out to be its final effort of propaganda, the society exerted every nerve and sinew, and a spate of letters, books, pamphlets, meetings, and petitions again flooded the country. During this time, the Dissenters made it known that while the fight for abolition was going on, they would not press for a removal of their own injustices.

Great satisfaction was expressed at the fact that when Buxton in the Commons proposed a motion for the abolition of slavery, he was assured that the Government itself would propose such a Bill and after a few months this was actually done.

On April the 2nd, 1833, the Anti-Slavery Society met in conclave to make a direct appeal to the government for immediate and total abolition. Abolitionist M.P.'s were present together with prominent leaders from all branches of Dissent.

Finally, five months later on August 28, 1833, the Act

which the government itself had promoted the previous May in response to Sir Thomas Buxton's demand, passed through its final stages and became law on August 1, 1934. Its full title was

> An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout all the British Colonies, for promoting the industry of the manumitted slaves, and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves.[111]

20,000,000 was paid out to the planters in compensation for their loss of free labor. One of the provisions of the Act was that the Negroes should render a further seven-year period of service, euphemistically called "apprenticeship" but which proved to be no more than a cloak for unlimited exploitation. The reports of the Quakers record even that the Abolition Act was entirely disregarded in the colonies by planters and officials alike. Under the leadership of Joseph Sturge, the Quakers had in 1837, requested the British government to abolish the apprenticeship clause. This was rejected, but the power of the abolitionists in the colonies themselves succeeded at last, in 1838, in securing its revocation.

Thus ended the long and weary struggle against slavery in the dominions of the British Empire. The most valiant and untiring warriors in the great crusade had been the Dissenters without whose support in money, time, and brains, the triumph never could have been accomplished. That their actions were in keeping with the highest moral principles and the spirit of Jesus no one could deny. That enslavement of the human personality

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[111] Jorns, op. cit., p. 230.

and the suffering it engenders is a crime against God and humanity, most Dissenters would have agreed. That a great number of Free Church people, especially Quakers, were constrained to support the abolitionist cause out of regard for such high and impartial motives as these, is true.

But it is extremely provoking of interest to realize that the zeal with which the Free Churches concerned themselves with the slavery question, and the manner in which the social conscience displayed itself in this matter, was on the face of it, quite foreign to the attitude which they were currently taking toward social enormities in their own country. Did it never occur to the supporters of abolition, that the same conditions which made slavery so abhorrent to them existed in a lesser, though nevertheless acute form, in the factories and cities of their own land? If it was a sin for a planter to make Negroes work for him for nothing and to regard himself as the sole arbiter of their lives, was it not equally a sin for any person--be he Dissenter or not--to be content with an economic system which allowed employers to grow rich upon the labour of little children who were underpaid, undernourished, brutally treated, and at the mercy of their unscrupulous masters? Indeed as we have seen, the condition in which multitudes of working class lived and laboured was slavery in all but name, and the life of the factory worker was not safeguarded like that of the slave by the fact it was worth 70 to his master.

The churches strained ever nerve to abolish social injustices which existed several thousand miles away, but did nothing

about those which disgraced their own doorstep. Why was this? Is it possible that for some reason this single issue escaped the previously described influences which in other matters stifled the social conscience of Nonconformity? On the other hand, it has been seen that the pattern of much of the activity of early nineteenth century Nonconformity was dictated by self-interest--at least by lower motives than those of the pure Nonconformist ideal; and also that Nonconformity was obsessed with the age-old struggle to achieve complete liberty in matters of religion--an objective to which all else seems to have been subordinated.

If none of these factors was operative in the apparent deviation of Nonconformist endeavor in the matter of slavery-abolition, then the attitude of Dissent must remain inexplicable. But the truth is two-fold. Inquiry will suggest that the unique character of the slavery issue placed it outside the constricting influences which ordinarily conditioned the attitude of Nonconformity to social questions; but secondly, that the centuries old struggle of Dissenters for the right to exist had induced a habit of thought which prevented them from taking action in any matter solely on the fround of a disinterested social ethic.

In the first place, it is not fair to claim that the advantageousness or disadvantageousness to Nonconformity's cause of entering whole-heartedly into the Abolitionist campaign was a conscious or a decisive consideration in the strategy of Dissenting groups or individuals. There must have been many who

acted only under the compelling power of a pure Christian ethic. Nevertheless, it remains true that the uncompromising stand which the churches took against slavery in no way conflicted with the interests of their middle-class ideology. To speak out against an evil practice taking place in remote islands across the seas, in which Nonconformists in the home country had no direct share, is something far easier and safer to do than to excoriate those injustices close at hand which Nonconformists themselves were partly responsible for perpetuating.

Moreover, support of anti-slavery was one of the few radical acitvities in the early part of the century which was not likely to bring charges of sedition or treason upon the heads of those who engaged in it, since it was not concerned, mutatis mutandis, with the affairs in the home country.

These however, are speculations which may or may not be capable of proof. But in considering the second part of the suggested reason why Nonconformity was so zealous for the freedom of the slave, we are not left completely in the realm of surmise.

There is some indication that one of the reasons which had much influence in determining the stand which Dissenting churches took against slavery, was that the conditions in which the slaves were compelled to work involved a curtailment of their religious liberty.

Further than this, there is direct evidence that the enthusiasm of Nonconformity for abolition, rose and fell in conformity with the persecution of its slave-colony missionaries.

In times of insurrection, when Nonconformist missionaries were accused by planters of inciting the slaves, and when meetings were broken up and churches burned, and missionaries were forced to flee, the passion of Nonconformists at home against the planters and in favour of the Negroes, on the ground that religious liberty had been violated, is well proven. The petition of the Dissenting Deputies to Parliament begging for anti-slavery legislation, was made out of concern for religious liberty, and this was one of the chief points of Sir Thomas Buxton himself:

> I am more anxious on this point, as I know on the one hand, the extreme animosity of the colonists to all religious teachers of their slaves, except those of the Church of England, while on the other hand I know the vast benefits which the Dissenting missionaries have imparted and are likely to impart to the Negro population, I think a system of unbounded toleration ought to prevail in the West Indies as in England.[112]

It would be too much to say that the issue of slavery was only incidental to the concern for the operation of religious liberty in the West Indies; but that the persecution of missionaries did play a part in crystallizing the attitude of many Dissenters cannot be doubted.

Whether the motives of Nonconformity in this matter were on the highest moral plane or not, it is a notable fact that the united strength exerted by Dissent was decisive in forcing abolition. It was the eradication of a great social evil, and an achievement due almost entirely to the spiritedness and relentless crusading of the Dissenting churches. It was a deed

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[112]Charles Buxton, Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (London, 1866) p. 277, quoted in Cowherd, op. cit., p. 112.

entirely worthy of the mind and purpose of Jesus, and proved to the world that the flame of conscience, though half-extinguished by the snuffer of interests inimical to the spirit of true religion still drew enough of the oxygen of the gospel to enable it to burn.

The Improvement of Living Conditions: Prison Reform, Health and Housing, Poor Relief.

The story of Nonconformist initiative in promoting the furtherance of humane and dignified conditions of life for their fellowmen in their own country, is largely one of individual effort. If Nonconformity as a movement felt no constraint to speak an authoritative word concerning the bad living conditions in which the working classes eked out their wretched existence, there were many individual Dissenters in this field of endeavour who struck a blow for decency, humanity, and the Christian Gospel.

As we have seen, there were some who shook themselves free from the prejudice, bigotry, obscurantism and selfishness of the Churches with which they were associated, and, prompted by no self-interest, plunged with fearless hearts into the task of bringing a measure of justice, liberty, and happiness into the lives of their fellow-beings.

Such men were numerous, and their activities cover every aspect of the social scene in nineteenth century England. It would be impossible adequately to trace the achievements of each one, and no more can be done than to sketch very briefly the contributions which the most prominent of these individual Nonconformists made in their respective fields.

Prison Reform.--The great name here is the Quaker, Elizabeth Fry. Before her birth in 1780, her predecessor in the work of prison reformation, the Quaker John Howard, (1726-1790), had persuaded the government to pass sundry bills to abolish jailors fees, provde medical attention for sick prisoners; and had rendered an immense service by bringing conditions of prison life to the notice of the country in his book, The State Of The Prisons.

In this great work terrible revelations were made. For example, it was brought to light that many prisoners had no food allowance, no water, no clothes, no bedding, and that they were loaded with heavy irons. Moreover, liquor was plentiful if they had the money to pay for it. The following quotations describe the conditionof prisons in Knaresborough and Plymouth.

> Earth floor; no fire: very offensive: a common sewer from the town running through it uncovered. I was informed that an officer confined here some years since took with him a dog to defend him from vermin, but the dog soon was destroyed and the prisoner's face much disfigured by them.
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> Three rooms for felons, etc., and two rooms over them for debtors. One of the former, the clink, 15 feet by 8 feet 3 inches, and about five and a half feet high, with a wicket in the door 7 by 5 inches to admit light and air. To this, as I was informed, three men, who were confined here two months under sentence of transportation came by turns for breath.[113]

The government failed to act on the revelations and recommendations of John Howard, and thirty years later when Elizabeth Fry took up the work, things were even worse.

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[113] State of the Prisons, quoted by S. Kenneth Ruck. "John Howard" in Christian Social Reformers of the Nineteenth Century (New York: G. H. Doran).

Between 1810-1817, the enormous increase in crime doubled the jail population of England and greatly aggravated the situation.

> Young and old, criminals, insane, and debtors, were all locked up together. Neither beds nor other furniture, not even common necessities were provided; the 300 women with their numerous children were obliged to sleep, wash, cook, and eat on the floor. They were entirely in the power of two wardens. No occupation was provided for those who were well; nor was any care given to those who were sick, who lay around helpless on the ground.[114]

Such was the scene which met the eyes of Mrs. Fry when she made her first prison visit in 1816. The year before, her brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Buxton the famous abolitionist, founded the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, and the same year she herself started at Newgate, "The Association for the Improvement of Women Prisoners," with the help of a clergyman and eleven other Quakers. Arrangements were made to provide the prisoners with work, and a clother manufactory was set up in the prison itself. This was in addition to the efforts made to relieve the physical suffering of the prisoners.

When the Corporation of London visited the prison sometime after the experiment was started, its members were astonished to find that the "hell on earth" of degraded beings to which nobody had dared go too near had been transformed into something resembling a "peaceful family group," and the reforms of Mrs. Fry and her society were incorporated in the prison regulations.

The work of the Association increased rapidly, and by

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[114]Jorns, op. cit., p. 178.

1836 every prison in the land was visited by a representative. Particular interest was taken in the prisoners after they had been discharged, and houses of rehabilitation were set up in many parts of the country, the first being Toothill Fields Asylum in 1822.

A great deal was done to relieve the misery involved in transportation. Elizabeth Fry herself visited every transport which sailed from the Thames between 1818-1845, and as much comfort as possible was provided for the prisoners on the journey.

This energetic and enlightened woman was responsible in addition, for establishing a "School for Discipline for Homeless Girls," and together with Peter Bedford and William Allen, she brought into being a "Society for Lessening the Causes of Juvenile Delinquency." The objects of this organization were, to study the causes of juvenile delinquency, to try and improve the harmful environment in which children were brought up, and to take over the care of children who had been released from prison. A large number of Quakers came to be engaged in the philanthropic work connected with the prisons. The most outstanding of course, were Mrs. Fry herself, but she was ably assisted by the two men named above, her two brothers, and by Stephen Grelle, who had introduced her to the work in the first place.

The beliefs upon which their whole endeavour rested were, that every criminal has certain rights, and that the purpose of imprisonment must be to reform the criminal so that he may

become a useful member of the community. Punishment as such is only to be a secondary concern. The Quakers strove to bring prison law and practice into conformity with these view points and urged strict discipline, work, and training as imperative requirements of prison life. Furthermore they recommended that jailors and matrons should be chosen for their honesty, kindliness and moral stamina. Strenous efforts were made to persuade respectable, educated and well-to-do people to give their support to prison reformation by visiting the prisons themselves.

One of the most important of the projects which the "Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline" entered, was the promotion of the Lancastrian system for education of prisoners, 87% of whom were entirely illiterate.

It would be possible to expatiate ad infinitum upon this work of prison reformation which was done almost exclusively by the smallest of all the Dissenting denominations. It was the practical manifesto of a Christian ethic, in which regard for human dignity and human worth was pre-eminent.

The strange thing is, that such a practical subscription to the words of Jesus (I was in Prison and ye visited me) was not carried out long before, and by other branches of the church. This was a realm of Christian service which was not hedged about with the usual disadvantages. It would not in any way conflict with the middle-class ideology nor could it be confuted with radical aspirations. As it was, the pioneers who began the transformation won the undying gratitude of the country and the government. Organized religion could not plead ignorance as an

excuse for its inaction, for in the eighteenth century, John Howard's book had drawn with vivid accuracy the ugly portrait of prison life.

The alternatives then, can only be either that the churches did not consider such work as coming within their sphere of duty or else they regarded it as being of less importance than the activities upon which they were engaged.

Health and Housing.--Reference has already been made to the appalling conditions in which the working classes were compelled to live and work during the nineteenth century. It is unnecessary to adduce further evidence for facts which all the world now well knows.

For at least half a century attempts to improve public health and factory conditions met with determined opposition from both employers and government. Time and again, attempts to secure the conditions of child-labour, were effectively quashed by arguments to the effect that it would be an unwarrantable interference with parents' and employers' rights, also that the long hours of work prevented the children from leading a life of crime. Public health measures were rejected on the ground that they would compromise the autonomous power of local authorities. That vested interests succeeded in perpetuating a corrupt social order is certain. How far such interests were middle class and Nonconformist is unknown. It is known however, that Nonconformist movements were not to be found actively campaigning for the enactment of public health, housing, and

factory improvements in the same way that they campaigned for the abolition of slavery. Preoccupation with such matters was left almost entirely to a few lonely, but brave and enlightened souls who were consumed with a passion to relieve the suffering of their fellowmen.

The most outstanding Nonconformist public figure in the struggle to secure improved conditions in factories was the Unitarian M. P., John Fielden, himself the owner of large cotton mills in Lanchashire. Raymond Holt claims that in this field of effort, Fielden was second in importance only to Lord Shaftesbury himself.[115] He was indeed an extraordinary character for those times, being one who seemed to be quite uninfluenced by any streak of selfishness. He was opposed on nearly every measure by his three fellow Unitarian M. P.'s, Mark Philips, John Bowring, and Edward Strutt.

Up to 1831, very little had been done by the government to regulate either child or adult factory labour. What had been done was ineffective for lack of enforcement. In 1831, Michael Sadler, a Tory M. P. introduced a Bill which would have prohibited the employment of children under nine, with the hours of those between nine and twenty limited to ten a day. The struggle to enforce such conditions lasted until 1874, with Shaftesbury and Fielden working together as its leaders, until Fielden died in 1849.

John Fielden had been brought up as a Quaker, but had become a Methodist-Unitarian in his youth. The year 1826 saw

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[115]Holt, op. cit., p. 183.

the publication of his first pamphlet "The Curse of the Factory System," in the preface to which he says:

> When I consented to become an M.P., it was not with a view to joining party men or aiding in party movements but in order to assist by my vote in doing such things as I thought would benefit the labouring people....I cannot believe it necessary that the manufacturers should work the labours in the manner they do...the proposition of My Lord Ashley to diminish the excessive work of those who work in factories...I know... to be of bare justice and humanity. The object of the following pages is to show that the work people have been and are being cruelly treated; that they have not idly asked for protection, but that humanity and justice require it; that we shall do ourselves no harm by granting it to them; but always avowing that I would cast manufacturers to the winds rather than see the work people enslaved, maimed, vitiated, and broken in constitution and in heart as these pages will but too amply prove that they are now.[116]

Such words, and such men, are like a spring of living water in the vast arid desert of Nonconformist insensitiveness. In 1845, Fielden published another pamphlet entitled "Selection of Facts and Arguments in Favour of the Ten Hours Bill." This latter was intended to refute the opposition of the overwhelming majority who among other arguments, contended that the hours of factory labour could not be reduced to ten a day without ruining the industry, and that the workers would be thrown out of work by foreign competition. There must have been many Nonconformists who honestly believed in the economic cogency of such arguments, and came to the reluctant conclusion that inhumanly long hours was a lesser evil than unemployment. Fielden however, with courage and intelligence, refuted every protestation, and afflicted the consciences of the Liberal politicians,

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[116]Ibid, p. 185.

Lord Brougham and Richard Cobden, who opposed him. Even the Quaker, John Bright consistently voted against the Factory Bill.

In 1833, Fielden and Shaftesbury together succeeded in forcing through legislation which in one respect went beyond the demands of the Ten-Hours Bill. It did not touch the problem of adult working conditions but limited the hours of labour for children over nine and under fourteen to forty-eight a week, and prohibited the employment of those under nine years of age. In contrast to previous legislation, government inspectors were appointed to enforce the terms of the Act.

In the same year, Fielden joined with Robert Owen in forming the "Society for Promoting National Regeneration" whose objects were:

1. Abridgement of the hours of daily labour, whereby a sufficient time may be afforded for education, recreation and sleep.
2. Maintenance of at least the present amount of wages and an advance as soon as practicable.
3. A system of daily education to be carried on by the working people themselves.

There is no evidence as to how much direct influence the work of this Society had upon the attitude of Parliament, but in 1847, Fielden moved the second reading of the Ten-Hours Bill which was passed. Unfortunately after the Bill became law, a legal flaw was discovered in its provisions, and it had to be annulled. So it was not until 1874, that Parliament prohibited factory workers from being made to work more than ten hours a day.

In the agitation for public health legislation, a Unitar-

was again the principal figure--Thomas Southwood Smith, who was both a minister and a doctor.

A great friend of Jeremy Bentham, and the Unitarian Radical M. P., W. J. Fox, Smith devoted thirty years of his life striving to abolish the unsanitary conditions in which most of the working classes lived.

He was one of the first men to appreciate the direct connection between bad sanitation and disease. In fact he advanced a theory which the churches had time and again condemned, but which had long been propounded by radical leaders antagonistic to religion; it was that, degraded character may just as easily be produced by a bad environment as bad character may produce a degraded environment. He showed that working people have no choice but to endure the evil effects of inadequate drainage,ramshackle, back-to-back housing, and a polluted water supply; that such conditions destroyed their health, increased their poverty, and led them into crime.

Nobody took much notice, until the 1840's witnessed a terrible cholera scourge which ravaged the working-class areas and decimated the population. This spectacular event roused the interest of the public, and Smith insisted that insanitary conditions were responsible. In 1841 he had given evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Commons and made a Report to the Poor Law Commissioners which they read with "horrow and incredulity." In 1843, he had been chosen as spokesman for "The Metropolitan Assocation for Improving the Dwellings of the Working Classes," and while the cholera epidemic was at its

height in 1844, Smith, together with such notables as Lord Shaftesbury found a Health of Towns Association which four years later was instrumental in persuading the government to set up a General Board of Health with powers to compel local authorities to carry out sanitary improvements. Such a project was short lived however, for when the Cholera scare had died down, the government, aided by Nonconformists M.P.'s voted to discontinue the organization and nothing more was done about public health until 1872 when a Liberal Government passed the Public Health Act.

The conditions against which Southwood Smith spent his life campaigning were nowhere worse than in birmingham where we are told, "public interests became enfeebled, personal rivalries and petty jealousies exerted sway," and "where the Birmingham Town Council became a perfunctory disrespected clique of bumbledom."[117]

Into this situation came the Unitarian, Joseph Chamberlain, "who", says J. L. Hammond, "was the first statesman of commanding power to put the whole question of Town civilization in its proper place." His polices were strangely reminiscent of Robert Owen, thus--"All monopolies which are sustained in any way by the state ought to be in the hands of the representatives of the people by whom they should be administered and to whom their profits should go."

In his struggle to provide the people of Birmingham with

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[117] Ibid, p. 231.

decent housing, cheap gas, seven-day-a-week free water,[118] and low rates, he waged a bitter battle against vested interests, but in the end after only seven years, first as Councillor, then as Mayor (1873-1876) succeeded in every scheme of municipal socialism, and made Birmingham a model of city government.

Elizabeth Fry, John Fielden and Joseph Chamberlain are the rare examples of devoutly religious Nonconformists who acutely perceived the social implications of the Christian ethic and did something about it at a time when interference with the status quo was unusual and unpopular both with Church and State. They were Christian pioneers who believed that a concern for the physical welfare of people as well as the spiritual, was a part of that gospel which the Church had failed to preach. They were Christian pioneers who believed that a concern for the physical welfare of people as well as the spiritual, was a part of that gospel which the Church had failed to preach. They stand in a select company, together with a few others equally devout and courageous, but the record of whose doings, as lesser lights has not been bequeathed to posterity.

Before consideration is given in the next section to such as these, mention must be made of one whose achievements are to this day ranked as a classic triumph in the field of housing and factory reform.

The name of George Cadbury (1839-1922) is a household word upon the lips of every British subject, for not only does

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[118] Up to that time, water had been available only on three days of the week.

the Cadbury organization today produce nearly half of the nation's chocolate, but George Cadbury himself was the founder of a new type of factory and a new type of town.

An earnest Quaker all his life, Mr. Cadbury was horrified by the abject misery which the conditions of factory life imposed upon the workers, and moreover, did not believe excessive labour, poor wages, and unhealthy workrooms were an economic necessity. The two brothers, George and Richard, decided that the little chocolate business they inherited from their father would be conducted on very different lines, and in 1879, took the bold step of moving the factory from the centre of Birmingham to a country site four miles outside the city. In the mind of the Cadburys, housing reform went hand in hand with revision of industrial policy, and they believed in the principal of a legally enforced minimum wage, on the ground that in no other way could the workers afford to pay for new and better housing.

The Cadburys had much in common with Robert Owen and rejected the orthodox econcomists' notion that wages and profits vary inversely. Said George Cadbury in 1905:

> The evils of poverty will never be cured by the prohibition of liquor or betting....True radicals must go to the root of the matter as our name implies, that is I belive, land monopoly.[119]

Dissenters had been eager to shut up the public houses and gambling dens without putting anything in their place. But George Cadbury believed that a good garden was the best counter attraction to the public house and in that form, the land should be-

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[119] Christian Social Reformers of the Nineteenth Century (New York: G. H. Doran) p. 192.

come "the storehouse of the poor, rather than the playground of the rich."

The central theme of the policy which the two pioneering brothers pursued during the whole of their business life, is that employees needs and interests are more important than profits.[120] The result was that the Cadburys built a model factory and founded a healthy township.

As their manufacturing plant was built, spacious workrooms were constructed with plenty of air and light; gardens of recreation were provided, with sports grounds, dining rooms, libraries, gymnasia, swiming baths, and a medical and dental service. Convalescent homes were built for those recuperating from illness, free educational facilities were offered to apprentices, and the two brothers encouraged their employees to acquire shares in the business itself. Financial provision was made for the sickness and old age of the workers, and as never before, the "Factory in a Garden" was made so attractive that it became the center of social life for all.

Such schemes as these, common enough today, were completely unheard of seventy years ago. They came about because one man dared to make of his religion a force as well as a form.

The second part of Cadbury's reforms was concerned with housing. He built houses for all his employees, all of different design, and with plenty of space in between each (also something unique in nineteenth century England). He planted fruit trees in every garden, and vested the ownership of the houses

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[120] In 1897, he gave £50 a week to support the Engineers Strike.

in a Trust made up of representatives from the employees themselves. Eventually the privilege of living in the Bournville Village Community, as it is called, was extended to all who wished to apply, whether they were Cadbury employees or not. George Cadbury anticipated by seventy years much of what is being done on a national scale in industrial planning by the British Government of today.[121]

Poor Relief.--It would be true to say that the direct contribution of Nonconformity to the relief of poverty has been in the realm of private philanthropy rather than in that of Parliamentary legislation.

There is no evidence that Dissenting churches were alive to the inhumanity of the Speenhamland system of poor relief or the equally unjust new Poor Law which was passed by the Reform Parliament in 1834 and bitterly opposed by the Chartists.[122]

No evidence can be discovered to show that Nonconformity was much concerned about the "abysmal poverty oriental in character" which existed in the industrial towns, especially in the "Hungry Forties."[123] This was generally true until the last twenty-five years of the century, but the outstanding exception again is the Society of Friends. Once more, they are able to show a record of practical fidelity to the spirit and principles of the faith which they professed.

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[121]Until too old to conduct it, he gathered employees together every morning for family worship.

[122]See page 67.

[123]In 1842 there were 1,427,187 paupers; in 1845 there were 1,539,490.

In 1832 the Quaker William Allen (1780-1840) established an organization called "Colonies at Home: or the Means for rendering the Industrious Labourer Independent of Parish relief." This scheme was established in the belief that migration to the towns was the cause of much poverty, and that one of the most effective remedies was the institution of collective farming.

One of the earliest examples of Quaker relief work is to be seen in the handling of the unemployment crisis in the silk industry in London in 1810. People were actually dying of hunger when the "Spitalfields Soup Society" was set up, and the "Spitalfields Association for the relief of special cases of Distress among the Industrious Poor."

This was only the beginning of similar but more advanced schemes for giving sustenance to the poor. One of these, the National Guardian Association founded by Elizabeth Fry in 1825, acted as an employment bureau, relief agency, and exhibited special concern for the needs of aged people.

Both Quakers and Unitarians were the most vigorous opponents of the Corn Laws and were largely supported by the Baptists and Congregationalists. The Wesleyan Methodists however, were the only Dissenting Body which refused to join in Anti-Corn Law agitation. Their ministers were told that to do so would be "contrary to his peculiar calling and solemn engagements as a Methodist preacher."[125] From the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the practice of Free Trade went hand

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[125]Prentice, History of the Anti-Corn Law League, quoted Faulkner, op. cit., p. 85.

in hand with a rising prosperity, and Great Britain supplied the world with finished goods. It was not until the latter part of the century that America and the continental countries could effectively challenge British industrial supremacy. For thirty years after 1850, the standard of living, measured in real wages, continued to rise, but this fact did not mean that poverty and overcrowding automatically disappeared or even that they grew less. In fact, an observer in 1893 reports:

> The social environment in England will not change materially for a generation to come, and the pressure of poverty and misery is daily increasing. The great cities are growing larger, the struggle for existence intenser, the overcrowding more terrible, and the resultant evils more appalling.[126]

There were signs toward the end of the century that some of the churches were gradually awakening to their social responsibilities, as far as their political and theological conservatism allowed them to do so. There is no evidence that any of them, or many of the individuals in their fellowship, were favourably inclined toward the idea of structural changes in the economic order of the kind proposed by the Fabian Society, and the Labour Representation Committee (afterward the Labour Party). Many good chapel-goers would still have confuted the ideals of such organizations with the revolutionary atheistic character of Jacobin philosophy. No! The Nonconformist churches confined themselves, in what seemed to be a period of growing social enlightenment, merely to experimental and palliative measures to relieve the miseries of poverty.

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[126]Amory H. Bradford, The Pilgrim in Old England (London: James Clarke & co., 1893), p. 303.

The famous settlements referred to on page 86, cannot be regarded as institutions for relieving poverty, since they were set up as "civilizing" not "relieving" agencies; but brave attempts were made by some sections of Nonconformity to go beyond the "settlement" idea, and to attack the problem of poverty itself.

The work of the London Congregational Union between 1885 and 1900 is a good example, and was the first large-scale attempt of Congregationalism to express a practical concern for those outside its own social class. In that former year the Rev. Andrew Mearns had published a description of conditions obtaining in the slums of London, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London. It was an attempt to stir the social conscience of Nonconformity, and marked the beginning of extensive social work by the London Union. By 1891, the Union had planted 180 mission rooms in lower class districts of the city, and had commenced the kind of poor relief which the Quakers started nearly a hundred years before. Its activities were numerous. Financial aid was given to those in real distress; the unemployed were assisted in securing work; footwear was provided for shoeless children to enable them to attend school; meals were furnished at a penny each to those who could afford no more; sleeping quarters were built for the homeless, and free breakfasts given.

Such work as this, though it touched merely the fringe of the poblem of poverty, and thoughit sought only to eradicate some of the effects of a diseased economic order without attempting to remedy the disease itself, was nevertheless a re-

markable advance shared by most branches of the Church at that time.

As Andrew Mearns spoke for Congregationalism in this awakening of Nonconformity to a vital mission long neglected, so did Hugh Price Hughes for the Methodists. In the preface to his volume of sermons, Social Christianity, preached at the St. James Hall in London in 1885-1887, he declares:

> In our reaction from medieval ecclesiasticism, we have gone too far. We have practically neglected the fact that Christ came to save the Nation as well as the Individual and that it is an essential feature of His mission to reconstruct human society on a basis of Justice and Love....The following sermons are a brief and fragmentary attempt to show that the social failure of Christianity is not the fault of Christianity or of Christ, but of us Christians who have been selfishly individualistic....Many have already come round to Charles Kingsley's belief that not self interest but self sacrifice is the only law upon which human society can be grounded with any hope of prosperity and permanence.[127]

Indeed, it was a Methodist minister who in the early 1870's appalled by the narrow class character of his denomination and its unconcern for the miseries of the poor, gave up his church and founded an organization to supply the deficiency. In the words of General Booth himself, he found it "impossible to look upon people undergoing starvation or weighed down by sorrows and miseries that came upon them through poverty, without stretching out a helping hand to help them on their feet again." They could not study wrongdoers and criminals and learn their secret histories which show how closely a great proportion of human sin is connected with wretched surroundings, without trying to help and reform them.

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[127]Hugh Price Hughes, Social Christianity (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1895) pp. viii, xii.

The schemes, projects, and plans which sprang from this basic conviction were multitudinous and at length, world-wide. The extensiveness and variety of the work of social regeneration which the Salvation Army was undertaking by the first year of the twentieth century can be appreciated by merely glancing at the contents list of the book in which the work of the Army is described. This is a random selection:

Central Labour Bureau
Hillsborough House Inebriates Home
Maternity Nursing Home
Maternity Hospital
Women's Industrial Home.
Anti-Sucide Bureau
Land and Industrial Colony
Small-Holdings Settlement
Emigration Department
Men's Workshop
Free Breakfast Service
Great Peter Street Shelter, etc. etc.[128]

No more than the briefest indication can here be given of the great service which the Salvation Army rendered to the Church and the community by binding up the wounds of the broken in in body and soothing their sorrows.

A typically ambitious part of the Salvation Army's work was the rehabilitation of the unemployed. Several thousand men every year were "placed" by the Army and when it was discovered that work could not be found for all who applied, the Army set up its own factories. One of the most important of these was the Spa Road Elevator for repulping waste paper. This institution regularly employed 480 men, who not only received wages but also the benefits of free board and lodging.

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[128]Haggard, op. cit.

Another extremely valuable scheme which the Army undertook, was to give opportunity to poverty-stricken slum dwellers to settle themselves on the land. To carry out this project, a loan of £100,000 was secured and 400 acres of land bought. This was carved up into sixty-seven holdings upon which houses and gardens were constructed. Tenants were given seeds and manure to last them two years and a living allowance of ten shillings a week, after which they were expected to make their small farm pay for itself.

By means of such projects as these the Salvation Army brought new hope and happiness to thousands of men, women, and children whose lives had been shattered, and for whom the churches cared little except to lament the sinfulness of their souls.

The work of the Salvation Army spread to nearly every country in the world. By 1909 it was rooted in 56 lands, operated 229 food depots and shelters, 157 labour factories, 116 industrial homes for women, 60 labour bureaus for helping the unemployed, 17 homes for ex-criminals, 37 homes for children, and 16 land colonies.

At first, the churches were scornful of the Salvation Army, but a few years later every branch of organized religion was itself embarking, though to a lesser degree, upon exactly the same kind of regnerative work as that in which the Salvation Army had pioneered. It is not unlikely that the Salvation Army, which in the name of Jesus Christ, and in direct obedience to his commands, was the instrument through which the churches first

came to realize their social obligations. But whatever the reason, for their growing enlightenment, it is a fact that soon after the Salvation Army commenced its ambitious programmes, both the Dissenting and Established Churches exhibited the dawning of a social conscience concerning economic injustices in their own land.

In the case of Nonconformity, almost simultaneously, in the persons of Mearns and Hughes their occurred something of a break with the traditional middle-class ideology in the practical concern for working-class peoples, and a rift with political Liberalism over the issues of Home Rule and National Education. Furthermore, Dissent had reached the position of mere equality with the Church of England, and this combination of circumstances opened up its greatest opportunity to retrieve former mistakes and to develop into an all inclusive religious body in keeping with the high catholicity of its doctrine of the Church.

That this opportunity was not perceived nor taken, is one of the tragedies of modern times, and as previously indicated, not unconnected with the October Revolution of 1917--and present-day international tensions.

CONCLUSION

The pre-suppositions which were stated at the beginning of this inquiry and which have guided the writer in making his appraisals, may not be acceptable to all.

The very fact that criticism has been levelled against organized religion for failing to realize its social obligations, may not seem justified to some, and, to them the fact that Nonconformity held itself aloof from preoccupation with social injustices, may rank as a point in its favour. The fulcrum of disagreement would be the differing interpretations of the principles of the Christian Faith, and every Christian is entitled to his own honest and serious opinions.

One important point however, which has the status of fact, must not be missed. The whole history of organized religion in the nineteenth century will be seen in wrong perspective if it is thought that the odd attempts made from time to time in the name of Christianity by individuals and groups, to change the existing social order, were novel aberrations from the historical tradition of the Church. This is not true. From the time of the prophets downward to the middle ages, religion has endeavoured---though not always in the right manner and with the right motives--to speak authoritatively in every realm of life and to claim for the highest spiritual values their jurisdiction over the whole of existence. During the latter part of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth, the church's traditional interest in the life of man in its entirety diminished almost to vanishing point--some of the reasons

for which have already been noted. It was only in the last twenty-five years of the century that the churches showed any signs of real awakening to a responsibility for the whole existence of all men instead of part of the existence of some men. Even then, that responsibility was expressed for the most part only as an obligation to relieve suffering and injustice within the existing framework of the economic order. The fact that nothing more was done is due partly to the influences analysed in Chapter II; but there are many who hold that it does not lie within the province of organized religion to defy what are called "unalterable" economic laws by agitation for revisions of the economic system, and that the result of doing so, will be to adulterate the high spirituality of the Gospel message.

Is the church, then, to be the propogator of a religion, which in Hoffding's famous metaphor, will allow it to be the ambulance corps of the army of progress, picking up and caring for the wounded and the weary, but will prohibit it from being the pillar of cloud and fire which leads the army forward?

Here again, though opinions may differ as to the role of the church in the world, the reason why the Church never gained the allegiance and good will of multitudes in the nineteenth century is that it either remained aloof from, or was hostile to, the effort of the unprivileged to secure their human rights. The task of the Church was divided between looking after its own interests and saving the souls of "the damned," but because it was oblivious to the welfare of others, it automatically deprived itself of the chance to save their souls--

a duty which, after all, was peculiarly its own. This only served to widen the gulf which existed in the Nonconformist Churches, between the middle class and the proletariat. The haughty attitude of the churches kept the working classes at arm's length, and working people can hardly be blamed because they failed to embrace the religion of their masters. The fact that they did not do so, bolstered the middle class character of Nonconformity, centering its interest still more upon itself, and re-inforcing the conviction of chapel-goers that poverty was the child of infidelity and sin.

There is no suggestion in these observations that the Church should compromise its own mission merely to win the universal support of all classes. The point to be made is, that if the Church had recognized as a part of its mission the necessity to transform the social order by infusing Christian values into its organization, and working for the removal of all that did not conform to Christian principles, then it might have won the working classes to its side, and escaped the stigma which now attaches to it, of being partly responsible for the fact that nine-tenths of those living in present-day England profess no religious affiliation.

To ask if the facts warrant us in laying moral culpability at the doors of our Victorian chapel-going ancestors, is a purely theoretical question. Perhaps they did not genuinely perceive any obligation deliberately to invade the sphere of industrial and economic organization in the name of humanity and at the dictation of the Christian faith. Perhaps they can-

not be blamed for being men of their time, although it must be remembered that if Christian people drink deeply enough and often enough at the living fountain of prayer and communion with God, they will develop inspiration and insights far in advance of the ideas and ideals of their own time.

The fact remains, the Church of today must learn by the mistakes and shortcomings of its forefathers, and must realize that to make good men and a good society is a process of simultaneous achievement.

Before the Church can carry out this divine, two-fold task, it must, as a first preliminary requisite, shake off every semblance of class character, every vestige of paternalism, every aspect of Pharisaic self-righteousness, and declare itself, under God, to be His instrument for the betterment and moral progress of mankind. Its task will not be to construct an ideal state in thought or imagination and then to transform the actual into some semblance of the ideal, but to carry certain basic principles of Christianity into creative action, upon every plane and in every phase of mortal existence. These are: The Sacredness of Personality, the Fact of Fellowship, the Duty of Service, and the Power of Self-Sacrifice.

In so far as the witness of the Church testifies to the everlasting and creative reality of these principles in the order of the Universe, so far, will the plans of God for mankind be brought to their final consummation.

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